

SHOULD I BREED MY DOG??

Almost everyone who owns a dog thinks about breeding it at least once. Raising a litter sounds easy and fun -- but having puppies isn't all its cracked up to be. Breeding dogs involves much more work and responsibility than most people are prepared for. Before you breed your dog, there are some important things to consider:

Will all your puppies find good, permanent homes?

According to the Humane Society of the United States and the government Census Bureau, 2,000 puppies and 450 humans are born every hour in our country. Right from the start, only 1 out of 4 puppies has a chance at a home. Finding a permanent home is even harder - only 1 out of 10 dogs will stay with its original buyer for its whole life. 5 out of 10 will change owners before they're a year old. The remainder of these dogs will end up in animal shelters, abandoned and unwanted. Even if your dog is an expensive purebred, your puppies are subject to the same statistics. At least *10 million* dogs will be killed in animal shelters this year alone because there just aren't enough homes for all of them. There are so many unwanted pets that cities all over the country are considering passing laws that will ban all breeding.

Your responsibilities as a breeder:

As a breeder you're personally responsible for each and every puppy for the rest of its life. Your responsibility doesn't end with selling the puppy - it only starts there! It will be up to you to know where those puppies are six months, a year, five years from now and whether or not they're being taken care of. It will be up to you to keep any unsold puppies or to take back puppies you've sold after they're grown if their owners can't keep them anymore. Since only 1 out of 10 puppies stays with its original buyer for life, you can expect to have to take back most of your litter sooner or later. The time to prepare for this is now - before you bring puppies into the world, not after. Will you have facilities to house these dogs? Will you have time to care for them? If you're offering your dog for stud service, you have as much responsibility for the welfare of his puppies as do the owners of the bitches bred to him.

As a breeder, you have the responsibility of controlling the reproductive future of the puppies you sell. It might seem like having just one litter doesn't add much to the dog population but - if your dog or bitch produces just one litter of four pups who in turn each produce just one litter themselves and so forth, in only 7 years your dog will have 4000 descendants! "Just one litter" has serious consequences! You'll need to learn how to write and enforce a contract requiring the new owners to spay or neuter their puppies.

You have a responsibility to your puppies and their buyers to produce the healthiest and most mentally sound dogs possible. All breeds have genetic health and temperament problems that can be passed on to their puppies. It takes experience and knowledge to learn how to recognize these problems. Many inherited defects are "hidden" - although your dog may not seem to have a problem, it could be genetically programmed to pass trouble along to its pups. Without expensive medical testing and a thorough understanding of genetics and pedigrees, you could easily produce puppies that will be a heartache to their owners and a financial burden to you. Reputable breeders check their adult stock for evidence of

hip and elbow dysplasia, eye diseases, thyroid and hormone trouble, skin problems and allergies, bleeding disorders and other problems before even thinking of breeding.

As a breeder, you must be prepared to guarantee your puppies against inherited health problems that may not appear until adulthood. This can mean refunding money or replacing a dog years later. Many states are now passing "puppy lemon laws" that would require a breeder to refund up to three times the purchase price of a defective puppy or pay for its medical bills. Temperament is also subject to guarantees. You could be sued if a dog you produce bites someone! You need to be there to give buyers advice on training, behavioral and medical problems. You're the "on-line" support for your puppies' owners for the next 10-15 years!

Having a litter is expensive

Raising a litter involves a considerable investment in time and money - money that you aren't likely to get back in profit. By the time your bitch is old enough to have puppies, you'll already have more than \$1000 invested in her purchase price, food & upkeep, vaccinations and the medical tests & certification to prove her suitability for breeding. In order to produce quality puppies, you'll need to use a stud dog that's as good or better than she is. Good stud dogs require a hefty fee. Most professional breeders won't be interested in taking a puppy in exchange nor are they interested in breeding to just any bitch.

There'll be pre-whelping exams and x-rays, post-whelping exams and shots, dewclaw removal and/or tail docking, puppy shots (two sets for each pup before they're sold), worming medication, extra food for dam & pups, equipment like whelping boxes, heating pads, puppy playpens, crates, etc. Problem pregnancies are common. A cesarian section can cost up to \$500.

You'll be taking time off work to help whelp the litter and make sure all is well the first few days, especially if this is your bitch's first litter. Dogs don't always know what to do and can accidentally kill their puppies. A problem during whelping can cost your bitch her life if you're not there to tend her. You can depend on a 25% mortality rate for newborn puppies no matter how well you care for them. Birth defects like cleft palates are also common. Then there will be advertising costs to help sell your puppies. Depending on your breed and part of the country, it can take up to 4 months to find proper homes for your whole litter. Even breeders of top quality show dogs rarely break even on their expenses.

AKC registration requirements

If you plan to register your litter with the AKC, you need to become familiar with their rules and record keeping requirements. You should be aware that they have the right to inspect your premises and breeding records at any time. If your record keeping doesn't meet their standards, they can refuse to register your puppies, impose a fine and suspend you from registration privileges for life.

Before going any further, think hard about your reasons for wanting to breed a litter. Here are some of the most common ones:

"Nature intended for dogs to have puppies."

Nature doesn't control our pets' reproductive careers any more - people do. Nature's way is very different than ours. Nature never intends for all animals to reproduce. In the wild, nature sees to it that only the strongest, fittest and smartest animals survive long enough to have babies. Nature only allows females to conceive when the food supply and environment is suitable to assure their offspring a good future. We humans allow our animals to reproduce anytime whether if there is a future for them or not.

"We're doing it for the kids."

Seeing the miracle of birth isn't all it's cracked up to be. It's messy, bloody and usually happens in the middle of the night. It's painful for the bitch and her cries may be more than you or the kids can stand. There are videos and books available to show children what birth is like without the responsibility and expense of raising puppies.

"We want another dog just like this one."

Your puppies have at least a 50-50 chance of taking after the other parent instead! Your dog is unique, special. The laws of heredity make it impossible for any two to be exactly alike. Many of the qualities of personality that make your dog so adorable to you are developed, not inherited.

"We want to keep a puppy."

It's far cheaper and easier to buy a new puppy than to breed one yourself!

"All our friends want one."

Almost everyone who saw your dog as a pup will tell you they want one "someday". That someday is seldom when your puppies are ready for their new homes! You'll be amazed at how many people suddenly don't have time for a pup right now or aren't willing to pay your price. Don't count on vague promises!

Placing puppies in good homes is easier said than done. Not everyone should own a dog and bad owners aren't always easy to sort from the good ones. You have to be a good judge of character and willing to spend time getting to know people before you sell them a puppy. Do they have the experience to raise and train your puppy and if not, are you willing to teach them? Is this the BEST possible home for this particular puppy? Do you know how to evaluate puppy potential to match the right dog with the right person? Will you be willing to hang on to each pup until just the right home comes along?

"She needs to experience sex" ... or ... "it'll settle him down."

No, on both counts. Sex in animals is governed by hormones. There is no

love, emotion or thinking involved. A bitch only "thinks" about sex when she's in season. The experience is forgotten once her season is over. Males only think about sex when they're near a bitch in season. Breeding won't settle your dog down at all - it will make your male dog worse. He'll become more territorial and aggressive toward other dogs, may lose his house manners, and will become uncontrollable if there's a breedable bitch in the neighborhood. If they've never had it, they don't miss it!
"Settling" a dog down male or female. is a matter of maturity and training, not sex!

There's no truth to the old wives' tale that bitches need to have a litter before spaying. Veterinarians who still give that advice are behind the times! Research shows that even baby puppies may be spayed or neutered with no ill effects. Spaying a bitch before her first heat cycle eliminates the risk of breast cancer and life-threatening uterine infections. Neutering a male dog won't make him a wimp! In fact, neutering will make him a better, more trainable pet by allowing him to channel what used to be sexual energy into other, more constructive, areas.

"We want to get back our investment in our dog."

As I pointed out earlier, you're not likely to make a profit from raising puppies. In fact, raising a litter will probably cost more than you ever imagined! You probably bought your dog to provide companionship and pleasure. Even you paid as much as \$500 for it, that's only an "investment" of \$50 a year if your dog lives for 10 years - less than \$1 a week. Isn't the companionship, pleasure, love and loyalty your dog gives you worth that much?

Learning how to breed responsibly

If you sincerely feel that you have exceptionally good reasons for breeding your dog and can live up to the great responsibility involved, your work is just beginning!

Your first step is to call the American Kennel Club for a referral to the national and local clubs for your breed. Join the club to meet and learn from other serious breeders. Subscribe to dog magazines, especially the national magazine for your breed and the AKC GAZETTE. Read everything you can find pertaining not only to your breed, but all breeds. You'll need an education in all canine subjects, medical concerns, anatomy and structure, behavior, training and even some psychology for working with the owners of your new puppies. Go to dog shows where you can see and touch other examples of your breed and learn what makes them better than average.

One of the most important parts of your education is learning what the "breed standard" means. Each AKC-recognized breed has a written standard of perfection. It describes what that breed should look, move and act like. Serious breeders constantly measure, test and compare against this standard before deciding whether their chosen dog is good enough to breed. They show their dogs in order to compare them with others of high quality. Standards aren't easily understood in one reading. It takes study and exposure to hundreds of dogs before you can really see why certain characteristics are important and whether or not your dog has them to such a degree that breeding it would improve the overall quality of the entire breed. That's the real goal of serious

dog breeding and the ONLY reason to breed any dog - to produce animals that are exceptional in appearance, health, temperament and trainability.

It can take years to gain this kind of knowledge and along the way, you might learn that the dog you have is a fine pet, but not good breeding stock. If so, you're in good company. Some of today's most successful breeders began by finding out the same thing. They discovered that getting a dog of suitable quality meant a serious financial commitment and a lifetime of dedication to do their very best even though there would be no real monetary reward for their effort.

Breeding dogs today is a serious matter. Before going any further, visit your local pound or animal shelter to see what happens to the dogs that were raised by people who thought it would be "fun" to have a litter. "The miracle of death" by euthanasia is just as educational as the "miracle of birth"! If you intend to breed your dog, then you should be fully aware of what the consequences may be.

Will it be worth it? The answer is no. The decision NOT to breed your pet is one of the most intelligent, educated and loving decisions you can make.

For more information on your breed, registration requirements, or to find the dog clubs closest to you, call:

The American Kennel Club
200 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10010
(212) 696-8200 8:30a.m. - 4:15pm
Eastern time, Monday thru Friday

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Additional information you need to know regarding breeding and selling puppies in the state of Texas:

- **You MUST have a state sales tax permit.**
- **Income MUST be included to the IRS – the violation is a Felony.**