

How to Find a Reputable Breeder

Harley's Dream encourages you to consider adopting your next pet from a rescue or shelter, which are overflowing with homeless animals. A common misconception is that rescues do not have puppies – this is simply not true. Furthermore, 1 in 4 dogs in animal shelters throughout the United States are purebred, and mixed breeds also make terrific pets. Most of these dogs have ended up in the shelter due to life changes, cost, lack of time, or allergies, and not because of anything the dog did.

When you choose adoption over purchasing a dog, you save two lives – the life of the dog you adopted, and the dog that can now take its place in the shelter.

If you still choose to purchase a puppy, here are some guidelines to help ensure that your dog is coming from a reputable breeder who raises healthy dogs with good temperaments, and not from a puppy mill or backyard breeder.

Locating a reputable breeder:

- First, do your research into the breed of dog you are wanting and ensure that your lifestyle is truly a good fit. Be aware of what you are signing on for—consider finances and time commitments, and what you might do if life circumstances change (divorce, having a child, moving, job loss, illness, etc). When you obtain a pet, you are committing to providing for them for the entirety of their life. Also, be sure that you are ready to get a puppy, which will be more energetic and demanding of your time and patience than an adult dog.
- Make sure you are knowledgeable about the dog-related laws in your community (leash and confinement laws, breed restrictions, fines/fees/restrictions at your apartment or condominium if you rent, vaccination requirements, licensing and registration requirements, etc). A reputable breeder may ask you if you are familiar with these laws.
- Get a reference for a breeder. Area kennel clubs should be able to provide information on local breeders. Other good sources for recommendations include local obedience training clubs, veterinarians, and groomers.
- The classified section of the newspaper or other social media outlets such as Facebook buy/sell groups are not recommended, as those individuals are typically backyard breeders who are not knowledgeable about the breed, which can result in behavioral issues or health problems in the puppies. Reputable breeders typically have no issues finding homes for their dogs (sometimes years in advance), and do not need to advertise.
- Ask the following questions of the breeder before going to meet the dogs so that your judgment is not clouded by seeing all of the cute puppies.

Questions to ask the breeder:

- Where do the puppies live? The answer should be “in the house with the family”—not in a backyard, garage, or basement. You want your puppy to be properly socialized early on, and that requires it to be treated as a beloved family member.
- How often are the puppies handled? Puppies should be handled often by lots of different people to encourage healthy socialization and proper development, which prevents behavioral issues down the road.
- Can I meet the parents? The answer should be yes. At the very least, you should be able to meet the mother of the puppy, who should be clean, healthy, friendly, and well behaved. The parents of the puppy will give you good insight into the future personality of the puppy, as well as if you have found a good breeder and a good litter.
- How many litters do you raise a year? The answer should be no more than one or two litters (total) per year to ensure that the dogs are getting the attention and care that they need. With that said, each female dog should be bred no more than once per year.
- How many different types of breeds do you raise? A reputable breeder only breeds one or two types of dog, and is knowledgeable about each breed, their temperament, and their needs.
- Can I have copies of the health clearances? The breeder should be able to provide documentation that the parent and grandparent dogs were tested for hereditary problems. (also make sure you have done the research into the breed to be knowledgeable about what the parent dogs should be tested for).
- Can I talk to someone who has bought a puppy from you? Breeders should be willing to provide several references from previous customers, as well as other breeders.

A reputable breeder:

- Does not sell to pet stores, sell their dogs online, or allow for dogs to be shipped; they want to meet potential homes to ensure that their puppies are going to good, suitable homes
- Does not come off as a ‘high-pressure salesman’, but instead someone who is invested in finding a good family for the puppy, asks you many questions, and will encourage you to make the right decision
- Should be willing to answer any questions you have and should also ask you many questions to ensure you know what to expect with your new puppy—that you are knowledgeable about the breed and temperament and have made all the necessary preparations
- Encourages multiple visits and asks that your entire family meets the puppy, as well as the puppy’s parents. They want to see how all members of your family interact with the dogs, particularly if you have children

- Does not breed “teacup” varieties, which are obtained through breeding runts and leads to a host of severe and often life-limiting health problems
- Does not specialize in sizes or colors that are unusual or rare for the breed, as this can cause future health problems and it indicates that the breeder is only interested in making money and not in bettering the breed
- Can explain in detail all of the potential genetic and developmental problems inherent to the breed, as well as provide documentation that the puppy’s parents have been professionally evaluated in an effort to breed those problems out of their puppies, including genetic testing for diseases
- Does not always have puppies available, but should be able to refer you to other reputable breeders or breed clubs, and may keep a list of interested people for the next available litter
- Requires you to visit the dogs in their home, which should be spacious and kept clean; the environment the dogs live in should resemble that of a responsible pet owner
- Has dogs that appear clean, well-maintained, well-nourished, healthy, sociable, and lively, and that don’t shy away from visitors or the breeders
- Dogs should be kept in a space that adequately suits their needs; for example, small breeds should be housed in the home, sporting breeds must have plenty of space for exercise, etc. (Information on breed-specific needs is available from the national breed clubs, and you should be well-read on this before going to a breeder so that you know what to look for)
- Can provide veterinarian records for your puppy and has a strong relationship with a local vet; they will not require you to use a specific veterinarian once you bring your puppy home, however
- Can provide references from other families who have previously purchased a puppy from them, and even references from other reputable breeders
- Is actively involved with breed-specific clubs at the local, state, and national levels
- Will not allow you to take your puppy home until it is 8 to 12 weeks old
- Can offer you guidance and assistance in the care and training of your puppy even after you take your puppy home, and will follow-up regularly to see how things are going and to ensure that there are no issues or concerns
- Provides a written contract and health guarantee and allows you plenty of time to read through it thoroughly

A reputable breeder requires you to:

- Explain why you want a dog, and ensure that you are both knowledgeable of this specific breed’s needs and that your lifestyle is a good fit

- Explain things such as who in your family will be responsible for the puppy's daily care and training, how often you are home and where your puppy will be kept when you are not at home, where the dog will spend most of its time, who will care for the dog if you are out of town, what 'rules' have been decided for the dog (such as whether it will be allowed on furniture, where it will sleep, etc), and how undesirable behavior in the puppy will be corrected
- Provide proof from your landlord that you are allowed to have a dog (if you rent), and may require you to provide proof of a fenced yard (depending upon circumstances—not all will require this)
- Demonstrate that you have a suitable home environment (such as a fenced yard) and lifestyle to meet the dog's particular needs (exercise and mental stimulation needs, are home enough, etc.)
- Provide veterinary references if you have previously owned or currently own other pets, and possibly other character references
- Ensure that the puppy will be a good fit with your other pets and/or your children, if you have them
- Sign a written contract that you will spay or neuter the dog (unless you will be actively showing him or her in dog show competitions), provide adequate medical care, and take adequate precautions to prevent unnecessary problems (vaccines, keeping dog tags on, etc.)
- Sign a written contract stating that you will return the dog to the breeder should you be unable to keep the dog at any point in the dog's life, or if you are not meeting a set of specified conditions of care

If the breeder you are working with does not meet all of the above minimum criteria listed, we advise you to walk away. Be selective and remember that while finding a reputable breeder often takes time, obtaining a healthy, happy puppy from clean and humane conditions will be well worth it.

Learn more at www.HarleysDream.org

