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Finding a Responsible Breeder- Myths and Facts

You're looking for that dream puppy. You think you know just what you want. But do you? Before you buy, please consider if you have chosen a truly good breeder. You deserve a happy, healthy, wonderful puppy! You'll be living with your choice for more than a decade- take the time to choose carefully!



Here are a few thoughts you may have. Click on the links to find out the myths or facts! Wherever possible, I have also tried to include useful links for more information.:

Show Dogs Versus Pet Dogs

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I don't want a fancy show puppy. I just want a good pet.

The most important job that any dog has is to be a good pet!

There are several qualities that a dog needs to have to be a good pet. It should be healthy and well-socialized (to children, other people, and other animals). In addition, it should grow up to look and act like what you would expect of a dog of that breed- after all, you chose a breed based on the characteristics that it should have. A Golden Retriever puppy should grow up to be a 70-pound easily trainable retrieving maniac that loves everyone and can play all day. It should not grow up to be a 120-pound dog that fights with other dogs, hates kids, cannot be housebroken, and refuses to retrieve.

If someone simply breeds two unevaluated Goldens together, the offspring may not look or act like a true Golden should. If these offspring are bred to other unevaluated dogs, pretty soon you will have dogs that are Goldens in name only but that look and act nothing like a well-bred Golden Retriever.

In addition, anyone who buys a dog as a family pet want to ensure that the dog is healthy. Responsible breeders will ensure this by doing the proper genetic testing to ensure that the parents of their puppies are healthy. Less reputable breeders are unlikely to know that such tests exist, let alone do them.

Your best chances of getting a healthy puppy are to buy one from someone whose motivation for breeding is to produce the finest possible dogs. That means someone who breeds only dogs that are themselves good pets and good representatives of what their breed should be. It also means someone who tests their parent dogs to make sure that they are free from any genetic defects before they are bred. It means someone who knows the background of their dogs well enough to know what they should produce.

In most cases, the people who are truly responsible breeders do show their dogs, in order to determine that they do indeed resemble the breed that they are supposed to be. Show and performance events are how responsible breeders make sure that their dogs both look and act how their breeds are supposed to look and act. And they keep their dogs as house pets, so they know that their offspring will be good pets as well.

Every litter of "show puppies" has some dogs that will never be the show ring. They may be Shelties that are a half inch too big, Pugs without enough curl in the tail, or Dalmatians with spots that aren't far enough apart. These pups have been raised with as much planning, medical attention and socialization as their show-quality littermates. They make the best possible pets.

Links

- [I just want a nice pet](#)- An article from Diane Blackman's wonderful [Dog-Play](#) site on one person's experience with her "nice pet"
- [Who Cares?](#)- An impassioned argument for why we should care about dogs bred to be "just pets".

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The show breeders just don't want anyone else to sell puppies cheaper than they do and ruin their business.

Responsible breeding is not a business. Most good breeders lose money on their litters. As an idea and an example, a breeder of a litter of 6 Golden Retriever pups may have paid:

- \$150.00 for an OFA screening and evaluation
- \$30.00 for the yearly CERF screen
- \$80.00 for a thyroid test
- \$80.00 for a cardiac exam
- \$85.00 for a brucellosis screening and pre-breeding exam
- \$500.00 for a stud fee
- \$600.00 for shipping the bitch to the stud and boarding the bitch, then shipping the bitch back
- \$100.00 for pre-whelping vet visits
- \$200.00 for extra food and supplements during and after the bitch's pregnancy

- \$75.00 for a whelping box
- \$50.00 for needed supplies for the delivery
- \$240.00 for 2 days minimum off-work for puppy delivery and care
- \$50.00 for an after-birth checkup
- \$300.00 for puppy food
- \$300.00 for puppy checkups, shots and wormings
- \$20.00 to register the litter with AKC
- \$100.00 for miscellaneous puppy supplies

Thus, at a minimum, the breeder has spent over \$3000.00 on this litter. This doesn't count any medical emergencies, such as a caesarian delivery. It also doesn't count all the fees for performance activities, such as conformation showing and obedience, that responsible breeders engage in to prove that their dogs are breed-worthy. This can easily cost several thousand dollars.

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The breeder said both parent dogs had been checked by a vet, so I guess the pups should be healthy.

Most vets are not experts in canine reproduction. They also may not want to lose business by telling their clients not to breed. In addition, the breeder may have heard only what he wanted to hear, not what the vet actually told him!

No vet can tell that a dog is free of genetic disease just by looking at the dog. Most genetic tests require special examinations by qualified veterinarians. Your best bet is to know what genetic tests are needed for the breed that you are interested in, and to ask the breeder to show you the results of those tests.

Links

- See the links on [genetics](#)

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Only fancy show dogs need testing before they are bred.

Genetic disease in dogs is devastating. Every year, uncounted families are heartbroken when their beloved pets are crippled from hip dysplasia, go blind from progressive retinal atrophy, are found to be deaf, die of cardiomyopathy, or suffer from many other disorders. Many of these tragic incidents could have been prevented with proper genetic testing before breeding and/or screening of the puppies. Responsible breeders do this; irresponsible ones do not.

By conducting thorough genetic screening programs, responsible breeders can greatly reduce their chances of producing an affected puppy. Irresponsible breeders can make no such claim.

Links

- See the links on [genetics](#)

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What's all the fuss about genetic disorders? I haven't ever seen a dog with one.

Have you ever seen an old dog with "arthritis"? A young dog that couldn't move around very well? Chances are they had any of a number of genetic defects such as hip dysplasia, Legg-Calve-Perthe's disease or patellar luxation. Ever met a blind or deaf dog? Except in extreme old age, most blind and deaf dogs become that way because of genetic disorders such as PRA and congenital deafness of white animals. Ever met a dog with extreme allergies? This tendency is inherited. The list could be a very long one. Many times, we just don't think of our dogs' problems as genetic when, in fact, they are.

Links

- [Genetic Diseases in Dogs](#)- An FAQ on the commonest genetic diseases.
- [Hereditary Heath Problems](#)- An article on the most important problems, specific to Golden Retrievers but useful for other breeds as well.

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I don't know what OFA or CERF are. What are they and why are they important?

Dogs- both purebred and mixed-breed- can have a wide variety of genetic defects. Responsible breeders test that their dogs are free of such defects before they breed them, thus a purebred dog from a responsible breeder is more likely to be healthy than one from an irresponsible breeder that does not test. Here are some of the common abbreviations and terms you may see...

- [OFA](#)- Orthopedic Foundation for Animals. They are most well-known for certifying hip x-rays to determine if a dog is free from hip dysplasia, a crippling malformation of the hip joint. Your best chance of getting a dysplasia-free dog is to choose one from a pedigree where at least the last two generations have OFA clearances. OFA also screens dogs for a wide variety of other genetic maladies, including elbow dysplasia, copper toxicosis, etc. Their databases are searchable online, so you can check if a certain dog has been certified by OFA.
- [CERF](#)- Canine Eye Registry Foundation. This organization certifies that a dog's eyes are free from visible genetic disease. A breeding dog should have a current CERF, done within the last year. Their database is also searchable online.
- [Penn-HIP](#)- This is a test of hip joint laxity. The lower the number, the tighter the hip. It does **not** an indication, on its own, of whether a dog has dysplasia.
- [SAS](#)- Subaortic stenosis, a heart defect common in several breeds, including Golden Retrievers and Newfoundlands. Responsible breeders of possibly affected breeds have their dogs screened for SAS by a canine cardiologist.

- [Thyroid screened](#)- Hypothyroidism is a common defect in many breeds, and responsible breeders screen susceptible dogs to make certain that they have an acceptable thyroid level.

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I am looking for a working dog. They don't need all those health clearances.

Yes they do. A working dog needs the health and stamina to run and perform all day. Don't buy this excuse.

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The puppies are AKC, so they must be healthy.

The [American Kennel Club](#) is only a registry. AKC registration does not guarantee you a quality puppy any more than DMV registration guarantees you a quality car.

Links

- [What Does AKC Registration Really Mean?](#)- Proof that it is not a "mark of quality".
- [Registration](#) - The AKC's official page stating that registration does not ensure the quality of a dog.

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The puppies have a "champion background"!

Most times where this is used as a selling point, the puppies have one grandparent who is a champion. This means nothing. It is too far-removed to have much effect on the pup. It is the general background of the puppy, and the specific background of the pup's parents that is important.

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The breeder's dogs have won a lot of shows, so they must be good.

Not all show breeders are good breeders! Some live for the excitement of winning, and breed far too many dogs in search of the greatest possible number of champions. Sometimes such breeders are little more than glorified puppy mills. Most responsible breeders have only a few dogs, and keep them in the house just as you would your own pet. Screen **all** breeders carefully!

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The breeder says these dogs are registered with the Continental Kennel Club!

The Continental Kennel Club (as well as many other supposed registries such as the Universal Kennel Club, Worldwide Kennel Club, etc.) are not true registries as the AKC is. They will register any dog, even if parentage is unknown, as long as they are give the cash. They do not hold shows or any other performance events. They are for-profit businesses designed to give "papers" to anyone who wants them. For more information on the ConKC, please see the [Continental Kennel Club FAQ](#).

Links

- [Continental Kennel Club FAQ](#). - The truth about the ConKC

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I don't want to pay \$600.00 for a dog! I'd rather have the \$150.00 dog from the paper.

The purchase price of a dog is one of the **smallest** investments! After you buy the dog, you still have many years of paying for feeding, vet checks, etc. That "bargain" Golden Retriever puppy becomes less of a good deal when, at 10 months of age, you find that the dog needs \$3000.00 worth of surgery for hip dysplasia. The "cheap" Chihuahua isn't such a bargain when it grows up to be a temperamentally-unstable kid-biter.

Links

- [The Price of a Golden Retriever Puppy](#)- What a badly-bred dog really costs. Real stories from people who bought "bargain" pets.

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I'm getting a cockapoo because mixed breeds are healthier and have more hybrid vigor.

Responsible breeders will not sell their dogs to people who are deliberately breeding mixed breeds. Thus, people breeding mixes usually have dogs that are not of high quality and have not been health tested.

"Hybrid vigor" in dogs is a myth because all dogs are dogs. A hybrid is created when two different species are mixed together, not when two different breeds of dogs are bred together. In reality,, breeding two different breeds of dogs together, then interbreeding the puppies intensifies the risk of genetic disease. For example, toy poodles can be subject to eye and skin diseases that are not found in Cocker Spaniels, while Cockers have some eye disorders of their own not found in poodles. When toy poodles and cockers are bred together to create cockapoo's, the resultant puppies can now carry the genes for the disorders found in poodles as well as those found in Cockers!

If you really want a cute little mixed-breed, rescue one from a shelter. Don't support disreputable breeders.

Links

- [Cockapoo FAQ](#)- The truth about cockapoos
- [Much Ado about Poo](#)- An article about the scams perpetrated by breeders of mixed-breed dogs.

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The snobby breeder said that I wasn't the right person for a Golden Retriever!

We often have idealized images of dogs. Not every Collie is Lassie, not every Jack Russell acts like Frazier, no Dalmatian can match the feats of Pongo and Perdita. It pays to research a breed thoroughly before you make a decision. A person who wants a cuddly Golden Retriever puppy may not realize that the cute ball of fur will grow into a big rambunctious dog that needs lots of strenuous exercise and sheds a great deal.

Responsible breeders are the best repositories of knowledge about a breed. If they think the breed is not suitable for you, they usually have good reasons why.

Links

- [Complete List of Dog-Related Email Lists](#)- Find and join an email list for your breed- and ask questions!
- [Breed FAQ Homepage](#)- Great articles on most breeds of dogs, written by experts.

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The pet store said they don't use any puppy mills.

Of course they won't admit that they do! Any breeder that sells to pet stores is **not** an ethical breeder. Good breeders don't send their precious puppies away to be bought sight unseen by anyone with a whim and a wad of cash!

Links

- [No Puppy Mills](#)- A comprehensive site on the disgusting puppy mill industry.
- [Buying Petstore Dogs](#)- The downside of that cute puppy in the window. Stories of Italian greyhounds rescued from puppy mills.
- [How to Recognize a Puppymill](#)- Warning signs that a breeder may be less than reputable.
- [Don't Buy That Puppy in the Window](#)- 10 reasons not to buy from a pet store.

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I found this great ad in the paper!

Responsible breeders rarely advertise in the paper- they usually have homes lined up for their puppies well before they are born. There are exceptions- so screen any breeder that you find in any advertisement carefully! The same goes for ads in dog magazines- some are from good breeders, but some are from notorious puppy mills.

Links

- [How NOT to Advertise on Usenet](#)- Another great article from Diane's site. Good information on how to read any ad, whether in the paper or on Usenet.
- [A Guide to Classified Ads](#)- How to read a classified ad carefully.
- [Reading Classified Ads](#)- Another good site on interpreting phrases in an ad.

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I have to have a puppy for my kid's birthday, and the breeder doesn't have any. She says I'd have to wait 8 months!

A responsible breeder doesn't produce pups on demand. She produces only when she herself wants a pup to continue her line. Thus, a good breeder is unlikely to have pups whenever you want, and a wait is common. It's worth it to wait and get the **right** pup, not the most convenient one!

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OK, I want to get a puppy from a responsible breeder. What do I do now? How do I find one?

This subject has been rather thoroughly covered on the Web, so I refer you to the sites below.

- **Links**
- [The Responsible Breeder](#)- a page from Diane Blackman's wonderful Dog-Play site. Discusses what a responsible breeder does for his or her puppies and why it's important.
- [Finding a Responsible Breeder](#)- Some good advice on locating a good breeder.
- [When a Dog is a Lemon](#)- Legal recourses when you get a sick dog from an irresponsible breeder.
- [Finding a Responsible Breeder](#)- A nice, short article on how to find a breeder.
- [How do I find a good breeder?](#)- A nice, in-depth article. Written for Bullmastiffs but applies to any breed. Nice coverage of different types of breeders and of contracts
- [Buying a puppy](#) -Questions to ask yourself and your breeder. Written for Flat-Coated Retrievers but most questions apply to other breeds as well..
- [Desirable Answers](#)- What a good breeder should say in response to your questions. Written for Bullmastiffs but applies to any breed. Good examples of interview and contract forms.

- [How to Find a Quality, Healthy Puppy](#)- Tips from Good Dog magazine.

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What's a "backyard breeder"? Aren't most dogs bred in the backyard?

"Backyard breeder" or "BYB" is a slang term for the casual breeder; the person who breeds for money, or because "Fifi is such a nice pet", or because "She's a purebred and we want our money back", or "The kids think it would be fun". BYBs are responsible for producing the vast majority of unfit, unsound puppies.

Links

- [Barking those backyard breeder blues](#)- Stories from an animal shelter about the tragedy of irresponsible breeding.
- [Back Yard Breeders](#)- Why not to get a dog from a BYB. Written for Malamutes, but appropriate to any breed.
- [Backyard vs. reputable breeders](#)- How to tell the difference.
- [Responsible Breeders vs. Backyard Breeders](#)- how to tell them apart.

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The breeder has been in business 25 years! They are state-licensed and USDA approved! Isn't that good?

No. Only "volume breeders" need such licensing. Such people are producing puppies for profit. They are not good choices when you are looking for a caring, responsible breeder.

Links

- See the links on [puppymills](#)

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The breeder has both parents on site!

Responsible breeders choose the best mate for their dogs based on the qualities of the stud, not on his availability or nearness! In most cases, they do not breed to their own dogs. If both parents are on site, ask why- there may be a good reason, but it is usually a bad sign.

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The breeder said I couldn't see the parents.

Then walk away! You must meet the mother of your dog. If she is shy or aggressive or unhealthy, then expect her pups to be the same. It's OK- in fact a good sign- if the father isn't on the premises- as mentioned above, responsible breeders breed to the best male, not the most convenient one.

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But what vested interests do you have?

I am not a breeder. I have never bred a litter.

I have a Golden Retriever from an irresponsible breeder. She needed \$3000.00 worth of hip surgery at 10 months of age to correct her dysplasia. I don't think that any dog should have to go through what she went through.

I have fostered dogs from shelters. Every time I visit a shelter, I look into the eyes of all the dogs I **can't** bring home- dogs who are there because of irresponsible breeders and owners. The answer to why I care so much about this topic can be found in their eyes.

[Cris Waller](#)