



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

# How to find a responsible dog breeder

**Note:** The Humane Society of the United States encourages you to consider adoption from a shelter or rescue. If you choose to purchase a dog from a breeder, the following guidelines will help you make sure your dog comes from a responsible breeder instead of a puppy mill.

## A responsible breeder:

- Allows you to visit and willingly shows you all areas where puppies and breeding dogs spend their time. Those areas are clean, spacious, and well-maintained
- Has dogs who appear lively, clean, and healthy, and don't shy away from visitors
- Keeps their breeding dogs as you feel a responsible person would keep their pets: not overpopulated, crowded, dirty, or continually confined to cages
- Keeps their dogs in roomy spaces that meet the needs of their particular breed; for example, most small breeds will be housed in the home, sporting breeds will have plenty of space for exercise, etc. (National breed clubs can provide input on the specific needs of each breed of dog)
- Breeds only one or a few types of dogs and is knowledgeable about the breeds and their special requirements
- Doesn't always have puppies available but may keep a list of interested people for the next available litter or refer people to other responsible breeders or breed clubs
- Meets psychological, as well as physical, needs of their dogs by providing toys, socialization, exercise, and enrichment as befits the specific breed
- Encourages you to spend time with the puppy's parents—at a minimum, the pup's mother—when you visit
- Has a strong relationship with one or more local veterinarians and shows you individual records of veterinary visits for your puppy
- Explains in detail the potential genetic and developmental problems inherent to the breed and provides documentation that the puppy's parents and grandparents have been professionally evaluated in an effort to breed those problems out of their puppies. (This will include testing for genetic diseases for which there are valid testing protocols available)
- Offers guidance for the care and training of your puppy and is available for assistance after you take your puppy home
- Provides references from other families who have previously purchased one of their puppies
- Is often actively involved with local, state, and national clubs that specialize in the specific breed; responsible breeders may also compete with the dogs in conformation events, obedience trials, tracking and agility trials, or other performance events



- Sells puppies only to people he/she has met in person, not to pet stores or to unknown buyers over the Internet
- Encourages multiple visits and wants your entire family to meet the puppy
- Provides you with a written contract and health guarantee and allows plenty of time for you to read it thoroughly
- Doesn't require that you use a specific veterinarian

## A responsible breeder requires you to:

- Explain why you want a dog
- Explain who in your family will be responsible for the pup's daily care and training; where the dog will spend most of his or her time; and what "rules" have been decided upon for the puppy—for example, whether the dog will be allowed on furniture
- Provide proof from your landlord or condominium board (if you rent or live in a condominium complex) that you are allowed to have a dog
- Provide a veterinary reference if you have had other pets
- Sign a contract that you will spay or neuter the dog unless you will be actively showing him or her
- Sign a 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

[humanesociety.org/puppymills](http://humanesociety.org/puppymills)