

ANIMAL HOSPITAL OF LANESVILLE

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Pondering Puppies? Think Before Breeding Your Dog

By Bonnie Wilcox, D.V.M.

Should you breed your dog? This decision is complicated and requires thorough examination of your motivation, your dog's health, and the responsibility associated with breeding dogs. If you are contemplating breeding your dog, you must first face facts. In today's overcrowded world, we, the wardens of our domestic pets, must make responsible decisions for them and for ourselves. The following points should be reviewed carefully.

Quality: Nobody wants an inferior dog; the quality of your dog should be a prime consideration in selection for breeding purposes. American Kennel Club (AKC) registration is not an indication of quality. Most dogs, even purebreds, should not be bred. Although many dogs are wonderful pets, they have defects of structure, personality, or health that should not be perpetuated.

Breeding animals should be proven free of these defects before starting on a reproductive career. Breeding should be done only with the goal of improvement – an honest attempt to create puppies better than their parents. Ignorance is no excuse. Once you have created a life, you can't take it back, even if your creation is blind, crippled, or a canine psychopath!

Cost: Dog breeding is not a moneymaking proposition if done correctly. Stud fees, advertising, proof of quality, facilities, food, health care, shots, and diagnosis of problems are costly and must be paid before the puppies can be sold. An unexpected Cesarean section or emergency intensive care for a sick puppy will turn a break-even litter into a big liability.

Sales: First-time breeders have no reputation and no referrals to help them find buyers. Previous promises of, "I want a dog just like yours", usually evaporate.

Consider the time and expense of caring for puppies that may not sell for six months or more, if ever. What will you do if your puppies do not sell? Send them to the pound or dump them in the country? Veteran breeders with good reputations often require advance cash deposits for an average-sized litter before even considering breeding.

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Joy of Birth: If you are breeding your dog for the children's education, remember the whelping may be at 3 a.m. or at the veterinarian's office on the surgery table. Even if the children are present, they may get a chance to see the birth of a monster or a mummy, or watch the bitch scream and bite you as you attempt to deliver a puppy that is half out and too large. Some bitches are not natural mothers and either ignore or mistreat their puppies. Bitches can have severe delivery problems or even die giving birth. Puppies can be born dead or with gross deformities that require euthanasia. Of course, there can be joy, but if you can't deal with the possibility of tragedy, don't start.

Time: Veteran breeders of quality dogs spend well over 130 hours of labor raising an average litter. That is more than two hours per day, every day! The bitch cannot be left alone while whelping and then only for short periods, the first few days after. Be prepared for days off work and sleepless nights. After delivery, mom needs care and feeding; puppies need daily checking, weighing, and socialization.

The whelping box will need lots of cleaning, and older puppies will need grooming and training. More hours are spent doing paperwork, documenting pedigrees, and interviewing buyers. If you have any abnormal conditions, such as sick puppies or a bitch that cannot or will not care for her litter, count on double the time. If you cannot provide the time, you will either have dead puppies or poor ones. Bad temperaments, antisocial personalities, and dirty or sickly puppies result from shortcuts in litter care – hardly a buyer's delight.

Humane Responsibilities: It's midnight; do you know where your puppies are? Every year, 3.5 million unwanted dogs are put to death in this country. Millions more suffer in our streets. One-quarter to one-third of the victims of this unspeakable tragedy are purebred dogs "with papers".

The breeder who creates a life is responsible for that life. Will you carefully screen potential buyers, or will you just take the money and not worry if the puppy is chained in a junkyard all of its life, or runs in the street to be killed? Will you turn down a sale to irresponsible owners, or will you say "yes" and not think about the puppy you held and loved, now having a litter of mongrels every time she comes into heat, filling the pounds with more statistics – your grandpuppies? Are you prepared to take back a grown dog if the owners can no longer care for it, or can you live with the thought that

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the baby you helped bring into the world will be destroyed at the pound?

Due to these facts, dog breeding is best left to the “professional breeders”. What makes a breeder professional? Certainly not the profits from the sale of puppies. A professional breeder is one who has made a lifetime commitment to the well-being and improvement of one, or possibly two, breeds, having spent time, effort, and money researching and proving the qualities of potential breeding stock.

The professional breeder knows the breed’s history and standard, its strengths and weaknesses. He or she plans a litter only with the goal of producing offspring better than the parents, not for profit or vanity. The health and well being of the professional breeder’s dogs are far more important than their ability to reproduce. 🐾