



FINDING THE RIGHT BREEDER AND PUPPY

Before you fall in love with the first adorable Labrador face you see, take the time in an initial phone call to ask the following questions. You may not find a breeder who fits 100% of these criteria but don't settle for anything less than one or two negative responses. At the end of the list you will find questions to ask yourself. You should be able to answer all of them affirmatively before you begin your search.

Remember you are adding a new member to your family for the next 10-15 years.

NOW IS NOT THE TIME TO BARGAIN HUNT!!

Prepare to spend at least \$800-\$1200 or more for a well bred puppy.

You may have known someone who has or you may yourself have purchased a "backyard" bred dog or a pet store or puppy mill dog and had great success. However, the high number of serious problems seen in the breed today makes this event unlikely to reoccur. Chief among these are temperament problems ranging from aggression to shyness to hyperactivity. Hip dysplasia, eye problems causing blindness, heart defects that can severely shorten life span and auto immune disorders and cancer are also becoming prevalent.

Responsible breeders will do all they can to avoid these problems by researching pedigrees and screening parents for certain inherited problems before breeding. Caution! Pennsylvania is now the leading puppy mill state due to the high number of backyard breeders and puppy farmers who have found it more profitable to raise puppies than poultry.

Keep this checklist by the phone when you make your calls and Good Luck!!!

___1) Where did you find out about this breeder? Responsible breeders usually have a waiting list of puppy buyers. They usually don't find it necessary to advertise in newspapers or with a sign out in the front yard.

___2) Do both parents (the sire and dam) have a hip clearance from the OFA (Orthopedic Foundation for Animals), PennHip or Wind-Morgan? Ask to see the certificates. "My vet okayed the x-ray" is not a valid clearance. Prelims can be done before two years, but some dogs can fail to get final OFA clearance at two years, even if they passed before.

___3) Do both parents have current eye clearances from an Opthomologist or CERF certificate (Canine Eye Registry)? This must be re-done every year. Ask to see the certificates.

___4) Do either parent have other clearances, Elbow, Heart, and Thyroid? These are some of the other problems labradors can have and some breeders are checking for.

___5) Are both parents at least 2 years old? Final hip clearances cannot be obtained before that age. Prelims can be done before two years, but some dogs can fail to get final OFA clearance at two years, even if they passed before.



___6) How often is the dam bred? If it is every heat cycle, THIS IS TOO OFTEN, and may indicate that profit is the primary motive for the breeding.

___7) Do all four grandparents, siblings of the parents and any other puppies that they may have produced have these clearances? A responsible breeder will keep track of these statistics and honestly discuss any problems that have occurred in the lines and what has been done to prevent them from reoccurring.

___8) Is the breeder willing to provide you with references and telephone numbers of other people who have purchased puppies from them?

___9) Will the puppy have a limited registration with a mandatory spay/neuter contract? A breeder who cares enough about the breed to insist on these is likely to be a responsible breeder.

___10) On what basis was the sire chosen? If the answer is "because he lives right down the street" or "because he is really sweet", it may be that sufficient thought was not put into the breeding.

___11) WILL THE BREEDER TAKE THE DOG BACK AT ANY TIME, FOR ANY REASON, IF YOU CANNOT KEEP IT?! This is the hallmark of responsible breeding (and the quickest way to make rescue obsolete).

___12) Is there a written guarantee against congenital health or temperament problems, that does not require you to return your puppy or euthanize it?

___13) Will the breeder be available to answer any question you might have for the life of the dog? Is this someone you would feel comfortable asking any type of question?

___14) Is the breeder knowledgeable about the breed? Is he or she involved in competition with their dogs (field, obedience, or confirmation)?

___15) Are there a majority of titled dogs (the initials: CH, OTCH, CD, JH, WC... before or after the names) in the first two generations? The term champion lines means nothing if those titles are back three or more generations or there is only one or two in the whole pedigree.

___16) Are the puppy's sire and dam available for you to meet? If the sire is unavailable can you call his owners or people who have his puppies to ask about temperament or health problems? You should also be provided with pictures or videos.

___17) Have the puppies been raised in the home - not in a kennel, barn or the back yard?

___18) Is the breeder knowledgeable about raising puppies, critical neonatal periods, proper socialization techniques? Puppies that are raised without high exposure to gentle handling, human contact and a wide variety of noises and experiences OR are removed from their dam or litter mates before at least 7 weeks, may exhibit a wide variety of behavioral problems!

___19) Does the breeder provide you with a 3-5 generation pedigree, a contract to sign, copies of all clearances and guarantee, health records and material to help you with feeding, training and housebreaking?



___20) Have the puppies temperaments been evaluated and can the breeder guide you to the puppy that will best suite your lifestyle? A very shy puppy will not do well in a noisy household with small children, just as a very dominant puppy won't flourish in a sedate, senior citizen household. A caring breeder will know the puppies and be able to show you how to test them so that good matches can be made.

___21) Do the puppies seem healthy, with no discharge from eyes or nose, no loose stools, no foul smelling ears? Are their coats soft, full and clean? Do they have plenty of energy when awake yet calm down easily when gently stroked?

___22) Do the puppies have their first shots and have they been wormed & vet checked by the time they go to your home?

___23) Does the breeder have only 1 or at most 2 breeds of dogs and only 1 or 2 litters at a time? If there are many breeds of dogs there, the chances are the breeder cannot devote the time it takes to become really knowledgeable about the breed and if there is more than one litter at a time it is very difficult to give the puppies the attention they need and may indicate that the primary purpose for breeding is profit, rather than a sincere desire to improve the breed.

___24) Does the breeder belong to A Labrador Retriever Club and/or a local All-Breed Club.

___25) Do you feel comfortable with this person, after all you are entering into a decade long relationship? Are you feeling intimidated or pressured? If so, keep looking!

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF....

ARE YOU PREPARED TO...

-Take full responsibility for this dog and all its needs for the next 10-15 years? This is NOT a task that can be left to children!

-Invest the considerable time, money and patience it takes to train the dog to be a good companion? (This does not happen by itself!)

-Always keep the dog safe; no running loose, riding in the back of an open pick up truck or being chained outside?

-Make sure the dog gets enough attention and exercise? (Labrador puppies need several hours of both, every day!!)

-Live with shedding, retrieving, drooling and high activity for the next 10-15 years.

-Spend the money it takes to provide proper veterinary care including but certainly not limited to: vaccines, heartworm testing and preventative, spaying or neutering and annual check ups?



-Become educated about the proper care of the breed, correct training methods and how to groom? (There are many good books available, invest the time to read a few.)

-Keep the breeder informed and up to date on the dog's accomplishments and problems?

-Take your questions to the breeder or other appropriate professional before they become problems that are out of hand?

-Have the patience to accept (and enjoy) the trials of Labrador puppy hood, which can last for three years, and each stage afterward?

-Continue to accept responsibility for the dog despite inevitable life changes such as new babies, kids going off to school, moving or returning to work?

-Resist impulse buying, and instead have the patience to make a responsible choice?

If you answered yes to ALL of the above you are ready to start contacting breeders. Start early because most responsible breeders have a waiting list ranging from a few of months to a couple of years. Remember, the right puppy or adult dog IS worth waiting for!!