



Timpanogos
animal hospital

TO BREED OR NOT TO BREED by John Mandeville, AKC Vice President

Few things on earth are more adorable than a pile of puppies. So naturally it can be very tempting to dream about breeding your dog someday to produce more wonderful puppies just like her.

But before you decide to go ahead and breed your dog, the American Kennel Club (AKC) cautions you to stop and think long and hard. Then think a second and third time, even longer and harder. We believe the decision to breed dogs should never be made lightly. Unfortunately, however, it's often made for all the wrong reasons. You don't need to make this mistake. Carefully consider every consequence of bringing more dogs into this world, and if you do decide to breed, commit yourself to being a responsible dog owner every step of the way.

What does it mean to be a responsible dog owner? It means you will not breed unless you are sure you can produce healthy dogs with sound temperaments, and can see to it that every single puppy is placed in a home where it will receive proper care throughout its life. This may sound easy, but it's not what happens far too often. If you still need convincing, visit any animal shelter, where the sad sight of homeless dogs should serve to remind you that breeding is a serious responsibility. Even though the vast majority of dogs in shelters are not pure-bred, this situation illustrates that too many people are too careless with their dogs. So, as we've said, please think twice before deciding to breed.

Here are some specific points to consider before you make up your mind to breed dogs. First, is your dog healthy? Any dog that is going to be bred must be in tip-top shape—free of all diseases, parasites, skin conditions and infections of any type. Healthy dogs should also weigh the correct amount for their breed and be physically fit. Not surprisingly, too many dogs today are like us: They eat too much and don't get enough exercise. Fat, unfit dogs should not be bred. These admonishments apply to both males and females. You are especially asking for trouble if you attempt to breed a bitch that is not absolutely healthy.

Furthermore, all dogs should be checked for hereditary defects before they are bred, since even apparently healthy dogs may be affected. Two of the most common types of hereditary disease in dogs are hip dysplasia and eye disease. These diseases are widespread in some breeds, so you should not consider breeding your dog without first having it x-rayed or examined by a board-certified ophthalmologist. In other breeds, it is similarly irresponsible to breed a dog before it has received a clean bill of health for conditions known to be a problem. The owner of a bitch has the additional responsibility of making sure the potential stud dog has also been checked and been certified free of hereditary disease.

Stud dog owners aren't off the hook, either. They have every bit as much responsibility as bitch owner, even though they will not have the same ongoing responsibility during pregnancy, whelping and raising the new pups. Too often, owners of potential studs think, "Why not?" when friends or neighbors ask to use their dog for stud service. But unless you're prepared to do all the necessary health checks on your dog—and, of course, be certain the bitch

you're breeding to has also been checked—go no further. Also, a dog used at stud, even once, can be more of a challenge to control afterwards.

Temperament is every bit as important in deciding whether or not to breed. The basic personality of each pure-bred has been determined by years of careful, selective breeding. That explains why Pointers point, Retrievers retrieve, Sheepdogs herd, Bloodhounds trail, and so on. Unless you are sure that your dog and its prospective mate have sound and correct temperaments to pass on to their offspring, they should not be bred.

Another consideration is quality. Serious dog fanciers breed only show-quality animals—those that closely conform to their breed standard. Even if this is to be your first litter, your goal should be no different. Certain defects that narrow a dog's breeding potential will be obvious to you, such as an incorrect coat color or pattern. Others are more subtle. If you are new to the world of pure-bred dogs, all of this is likely to be both mystifying and overwhelming. Our advice is to talk to an experienced breeder; the easiest way to find one in your area is through an AKC dog club in your area. For information about the club nearest you, please contact the AKC's customer service department.

Owners of bitches must also weigh the risk of health problems during the bitch's pregnancy, delivery and nursing period. Do you have the time and energy to ensure that your bitch and her puppies receive the attention they deserve? Are you prepared to cope with the expense and heartache if something goes wrong and you lose the bitch or her litter, or you end up having to raise orphaned puppies? Can you keep the litter as long as it takes to find every puppy a good home? These are only a few of the questions you should answer before proceeding.

Perhaps the worse reason to breed dogs is to try and recoup your purchase price. Your plan is almost certain to fail once you add up veterinary costs and the price of your time. Another misguided reason is to provide sex education for your own children. There are many better ways to teach kids about reproduction without bringing more animals into this world.

If you decide not to breed your dog, we recommend having it neutered. There are several advantages, besides birth control, to neutering. Spaying puts an end to messy and unpleasant heat periods in bitches, and also has definite health benefits concerning certain types of tumors and infections. Castrated dogs are less likely to be aggressive and are less given to roaming.

So what is the bottom line? Should you breed or shouldn't you? The choice is up to you. The AKC is a firm believer that breeding dogs can be a wonderful experience—but it must be done for all the right reasons. First, you must recognize the range of responsibility implied by breeding, not just for the sire and dam, but for all their puppies. If you do decide to breed your dog, you'll be entering an exciting world. And who knows? Maybe someday you'll be the proud producer of an AKC Best in Show winner.