



# Don't Buy That Doggie in the Window: 10 Reasons Not to Buy a Dog From a Pet Store

By Laurie Bryce

## 1. Health.

When you buy a puppy from a pet shop, you're spending a lot of money for a dog whose parents you know nothing about. Have both parents had their hips and elbows x-rayed for dysplasia? Have the parents been tested for PRA, which causes blindness? *Tests are expensive, but responsible breeders do them because their goal is to produce healthy pups.* What's the pet shop's goal? If they say "healthy pups," ask them for proof.

## 2. That guarantee isn't worth what you think it is.

Pet shops make a big deal about their "lifetime guarantees." But ask them what happens when you need \$1,200 to correct crippling hip dysplasia in your six-month-old puppy, or \$2,500 to do a cruciate repair. *The guarantee requires you to give the puppy back so they can put it to sleep, which is cheaper for them.* Then they give you another puppy, one that's no healthier than the first. A guarantee like that is worse than no guarantee at all.

## 3. The AKC myth.

Pet shops want you to think "AKC papers" equals healthy puppies. It doesn't. The only thing AKC registration means is that both parents are purebred and AKC registered. The mother (dam) can be a truly awful example of the breed -- or worse, suffering from crippling disease or illness -- and the puppies can still be registered. Don't believe it? *The AKC says it right on their web site: "There is a widely held belief that 'AKC' or 'AKC papers' and quality are one and the same. This is not the case. AKC is a registry body. A registration certificate identifies the dog as the offspring of a known sire and dam, born on a known date. It in no way indicates the quality or state of health of the dog."* Many people breed their dogs with no concern for the qualitative demands of the breed standard. When this occurs repeatedly over several generations, the animals, while still pure-bred, can be of extremely low quality." A responsible breeder will of course register her puppies if the breed is one of the 150 or so recognized by the AKC, but that's only the beginning.

## 4. Good luck with housebreaking.

The puppies you see in the pet-shop window have spent their lives in cages. They've never seen grass, or dirt, and they've certainly never seen carpeting. Worst of all, they've been forced to eliminate in the same place where they sleep and eat. Once a puppy overcomes that early natural inhibition against eliminating in its den, any surface -- your carpet, your couch, your bed -- looks like a good spot for going to the bathroom. A responsible breeder keeps the puppies very clean, and makes sure they have separate elimination areas. By the time they're ready to go home, well-bred puppies are often well on the way to being housebroken.

## 5. How about socialization?

Imagine buying a puppy that has never been inside a house before! The doorbell, the vacuum cleaner, the dishwasher -- those things can be terrifying to a puppy who has never seen them. What about neighborhood kids, riding in the car, or just walking on a leash? *A responsible*

*breeder exposes her puppies to all kinds of new situations, and makes sure they are confident, happy puppies when they go off to their new homes. Plus, when you go to a breeder you generally have more than one puppy from which to choose. A responsible breeder temperament-tests her puppies to find out which ones are outgoing or shy or dominant. Then she matches up owners to make sure that active puppies go to active homes, and that a shy puppy ends up in a home that's just right for it. If you're going to spend all that money, it makes sense to look at several examples of the breed and then pick a dog that's right for you.*

#### 6. What will that puppy look like when it grows up?

When you buy a puppy from a responsible breeder, you can usually meet the mother and see pictures or video of the father (sire). You can discuss with the breeder the faults each parent possesses (maybe the mother has an over bite, or the father is a little taller than the standard). You can't predict exactly what the puppy will turn out like, but you'll know what to expect, and you'll certainly know that your purebred puppy will resemble his breed. *Why would anyone spend so much money on a pet shop puppy without even knowing what the parents look like?*

#### 7. Price.

For the money that pet shops want you to spend, you'd expect a lot more. Think about all the things responsible breeders do that pet stores don't: They choose the parents based on health and temperament issues; they pay for expensive tests to make sure both sire and dam are free from disease or illness; they raise the puppies with an eye toward getting them housebroken and socialized; and they help make sure the right puppies go to the right homes. *And after all that, a responsible breeder usually charges far less than the pet shops! Save your money and get a better quality puppy at the same time.*

#### 8. What do you know about the breed?

Pet shops can tell you a little about the breeds they sell. And they can point you to a rack of generic breed books. That's it. *A responsible breeder will be a wealth of information about the breed you're interested in.* She'll be able to tell you about unique breed characteristics, ways to get involved in activities your dog might be suited for, and most importantly, she knows what specific health issues to watch out for. If you like, she may continue to be a resource for you as the puppy grows up, and can answer questions about training, behavior, nutrition and more.

#### 9. Do you want to support the puppy mills?

How do you know pet shop puppies come from puppy mills? *Because no responsible breeder would ever sell their puppies to a pet store, for two reasons:*

1. Responsible breeders care about the puppies they produce, and want them to go to very carefully selected homes.
2. Keeping track of litters is an essential part of responsible breeding. If two puppies from a certain litter die from liver failure at a young age, the breeder knows there's a problem in the line and will not breed the parents again. What does that say about the breeders of pet shop pups?

#### 10. What's that pedigree worth?

Pet shops make a big deal out of their pedigrees, which is interesting because they just contain a bunch of names. Can the pet shop tell you how long the puppy's grandparents lived, and what they died of? How many of the parents littermates are still alive? How long do dogs in this pedigree usually live? A responsible breeder can answer all of those questions. You get not just a pedigree, but all of the important information behind the pedigree.

Still not sure?

Here are some questions you can ask the pet store. A responsible breeder will have ready answers on all of them -- and in fact would be concerned if you DIDN'T ask these questions!

- Have both parents been tested for hip dysplasia? (It's been found in every AKC breed except greyhounds, so don't let them tell you it's not a problem.)
- What specific health problems are in the pedigree of each puppy?
- What's the personality of the mother and father like?
- A responsible breeder provides copies of all health tests -- can the pet shop do that?

How do I find a responsible breeder?

Finding a responsible breeder is not difficult for most breeds, and the reward -- a healthy, well-adjusted, well-bred puppy -- is worth it. Here are some ways to get started:

- Call the AKC at (919) 233-9767 or visit their Web page of breeder referral contacts at <http://www.akc.org/breeds/>
- Use the Internet to look up the breed you're interested in. You'll find a wealth of information.
- Go to shows, fun matches or any kind of dog event -- there will be plenty of people there to offer suggestions and advice. Be extremely careful when evaluating breeders who run ads in the newspaper.
- Don't rule out a mixed breed or shelter dog -- they're wonderful pets, and frankly, your odds of getting a healthy, happy dog are better at the shelter than at a pet shop.

How do I avoid "backyard breeders"?

Backyard breeders operate in much the same way pet shops do. Money is the bottom line.

Watch out for any breeder who:

- Talks about money before anything else.
- Doesn't ask you questions about yourself and why you want a puppy.
- Says the parents "don't need tests." All purebred breeds suffer from genetic diseases, including cancer.
- Can't provide a good answer to the question: "Why did you decide to breed these two dogs"?
- Can't provide copies of OFA results (hip and elbow), CERF exams (eyes) or other health tests along with the pedigree.
- Breeds dogs younger than two years of age (two is the minimum age for hip certification by OFA).
- Has puppies always available. Responsible breeders have smaller numbers of carefully-planned litters.

Remember, finding the right breeder is the MOST important decision you will make in your impending relationship with a new purebred dog. This is a decision that will be with you for the life of the dog. Do your research and you stand the best chance of sharing a fulfilling life with your new puppy.

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