

PICK OF THE LITTER

Learning how to choose a dog responsibly

Deciding to bring a new dog into your life is a huge decision, especially now in the information age. The internet is full of opinions on where to find the perfect pooch, but often these opinions get in the way of important facts, which can lead to decisions that end up hurting the welfare of dogs everywhere. This is a compilation of research regarding the honest truths about the four most popular sources of dogs and aims to help you make a more informed decision when it comes time to find a new canine companion.

Some key things to keep in mind when reading through this information are:

1. Every person is entitled to their own choice when it comes to selecting a dog.

There are very real pros and cons to both adopting and shopping for a dog, which vary from situation to situation. A family with young children living in the city searching for a dog will be looking for something very different when compared with a single person living in the country, and so on.

2. These facts are focused on animal welfare, not just animal rights.

Animal welfare encompasses many different fields, such as disease, behavior, and reproduction. It is a more holistic approach to handling issues regarding domestic animals.

3. This is an ongoing conversation.

We live in a time of rapid progress and change, and it's important to constantly be performing your own research to ensure the information you are consuming is up to date, especially when dealing with living creatures. As stated before, strong opinions can often get in the way of important facts.

SOURCES

- 1 Signs of a Puppy Mill: How to Spot a Puppy Mill or Backyard Breeder, *Petful.com*, 2016
- 2 Mixed Mutts and Designer Crosses: Healthier Than Purebred Pets? *Dr. Mary Fuller DVM*, 2013
- 3 NAIA study confirms fewer dogs, scarce purebreds in US animal shelters. *Patti Strand*, 2015
- 4 Labradoodle Creator Says the Breed Is His Life's Regret. *Emily S. Rueb and Niraj Chokshi New York Times*, 2019
- 5 With Rescue Dogs In Demand, More Shelters Look Far Afield For Fido *Greg Allen, NPR*, 2015

Special thanks to all of my friends in the dog community for years of wisdom and support. Much of the information in this piece comes from your wealth of knowledge!



DESIGNER DOG

A 'designer' dog is typically a mix of two purebred dogs advertised under a fancy title. Some examples of popular designer breeds include labradoodles, goldendoodles, any other 'doodles' or 'poos', pomskis, puggles, and many more. Often marketed as hypoallergenic (especially the doodle breeds), smart, healthy, and irresistibly adorable on social media, these dogs come with a variety of pitfalls that are worth being wary of, so much so that the creator of the original Labradoodle has stated publicly that he greatly regrets beginning this trend.

"I opened a Pandora's box and released a Frankenstein's monster"

-Wally Conron, breeder of the first Labradoodle

PROS

- Extremely popular
- Strongly advertised
- Readily available

CONS

- Inconsistent
- Very expensive
- Prone to health and behavioral issues
- Often falsely advertised



\$2,000-\$5,000
Is the average cost of a designer dog.

Why is this? Many designer breeders claim their dogs have 'hybrid vigor', and the dogs they produce are immune to inherited genetic disorders because of a 'larger gene pool'. But this simply is not how genetics work.



"If you cross a Labrador Retriever that has hip dysplasia with a Poodle that has hip dysplasia, what do you get? Chances are, a Labradoodle with hip dysplasia."

-Dr Mary Fuller DVM



PURPOSE-BRED DOG

Purpose-bred dogs, more commonly referred to as purebred dogs, are animals bred by responsible breeders dedicated to the conservation and improvement of their breed. These dogs reflect the correct physical characteristics and temperament for the job they were originally created to do, whether that be hunting, herding, guarding, or even just being a loving companion. When you purchase a purpose-bred dog, you are getting the result of well-documented and careful breeding, health testing, and passion by the breeder.

"The purebred dogs in our lives are living, breathing, wagging symbols of the people and places that brought them into being."

-Denise Flaim, American Kennel Club

PROS

- Predictable behavior & appearance
- Health testing
- Breeder support
- Pedigree
- Contract upon purchase

CONS

- More expensive
- Can be prone to genetic issues

Not every breeder is a winner.



Learning how to spot a responsible breeder is key!

LOOK FOR:

1. Dogs that are bred for a **purpose**. This can mean any number of things, such as dog sports, obedience trials, conformation shows, etc.
2. Proof that the dog has been **health tested** (not just vet checked- health testing is a test of a dog's genes to ensure it will not encounter reoccurring genetic issues)
3. A legitimate **pedigree** offered with the purchase of a dog
4. A **contract**. This will often include what should happen if the buyer can no longer care for the dog. Most responsible breeders will require that the dog is returned to them to ensure the dog is placed in a proper home instead of ending up in a shelter.



BACKYARD-BRED DOG

This is a difficult category to pin down because it encompasses two groups: backyard breeders and puppy mills. **Puppy mills** are constantly featured in the news and on social media as cruel facilities dedicated to producing as many puppies as possible for a profit. Characterized by being unclean and using cute pictures of young puppies to sell sick and mistreated animals, it is strongly advised to avoid purchasing a dog from a puppy mill at all costs.

Backyard breeders are people that have little to no experience in breeding dogs, but either have an 'accidental' litter, or want to produce puppies for the fun/profit of it. Backyard breeders are one of the leading contributors to dogs ending up in shelters yearly. Inexperienced people breed two dogs without any health testing or knowledge of their own dogs' backgrounds because they feel like their dog "should be a mom/dad once in their life," and end up with an unpredictable litter that they have no planned homes for.

PROS

- Cheap
- Easy to access

CONS

- Often no health testing
- Prone to disease
- Prone to genetic issues
- Unpredictable behavior
- Often falsely advertised



Hidden Fatalities

Dogs that come from Backyard Breeders and Puppy Mills are extremely prone to disease and genetic disorders, either **undisclosed** to buyers or **undetected** because of minimal health testing.

- Epilepsy
- Kidney and heart disease
- Joint disorders, such as hip dysplasia and luxating patellas
- Endocrine disorders (diabetes, hypothyroidism, hyperthyroidism)
- Blood disorders such as anemia or von Willebrand (blood doesn't clot)
- Deafness
- Blindness
- Eye problems such as cataracts, glaucoma, retinal atrophy

- Intestinal parasites
- Giardia
- Parvovirus
- Distemper
- Kennel cough
- Pneumonia
- Respiratory infections
- Chronic diarrhea
- Canine adenovirus
- Undescended testicles



SHELTER DOG

A rescue dog is a great choice for a new companion. Often these dogs were surrendered by previous owners, found abandoned, given up as a result of accidental litters, or surrendered for other circumstances. A reputable shelter is one that provides adequate care and responsibly places the animals that are adopted out of it. It is important to know that not every shelter is created equal, though, and because the demand for rescue dogs has greatly increased during recent years, many shelters and rescue organizations have adopted some problematic practices. That being said, there are many shelters that do excellent work, and by adopting from a shelter, you are not only giving a dog a second chance at living a happy life.

"By adopting, you're helping make space for another animal in need and helping to give them the opportunity to become beloved pets."

-ASPCA

PROS

- In need of a home
- Leaves space for other rescue dogs
- Highly supported by popular culture

CONS

- Often unknown history
- Prone to health and behavioral issues
- Minimal health testing

Helpful or Hurtful?

While rescuing a dog is a noble undertaking, it's important to know where your shelter dog comes from, because some sources harm animals instead of helping them.



Overseas

To fill the demand for rescued dogs, many dogs are now imported from overseas. It is better to avoid adopting one of these animals because air travel is extremely traumatic, and imported dogs have been found with fatal diseases, like rabies.



Cross-Country

Often rescue dogs are transported from across the country to wealthier areas. Transport can be very stressful for dogs. There have been several instances of puppies dying due to heat stress in transit while trapped in hot vans.



Local

Adopting a dog locally or through a breed-specific rescue group is the most humane way to adopt. This keeps stress on dogs low, and money out of the pockets of large companies trying to profit from the surge in demand for rescue dogs.

THE BOTTOM LINE



KNOW WHAT YOU ARE PAYING FOR.

Don't be fooled into paying more for just a fancy name. The amount you pay for a dog should directly reflect how much effort and care went into producing the animal.



LEARN YOUR TERMINOLOGY.

There are still sources circulating that state 'purebred' and 'designer' dogs are the same thing. This is one example of false information that can mislead people searching for a dog. Take the time to brush up on your dog vocab!



DON'T GET SCAMMED.

By taking time to ask the right questions, you can learn to spot puppy mills and backyard breeders and avoid them. Before you fall in love with the cute photo, make sure you know where your puppy is coming from!



BE WARY OF TRENDS.

While there are many popular trends circulating online supporting the adoption of dogs, it's important to look below the surface and see who is really benefiting. Many large organizations seek to profit off the trends in adopting dogs instead of focusing on saving animals.