



Pets as Gifts

One thing a responsible breeder always cringes at is the calls for puppies to be gifts. This is not a scarf you can exchange or a box of candy you can eat or pass on. This is a potential member of your family for a decade or more. Any decision should be made with thought of the consequences.

First a potential buyer should research the breed they are interested in. Libraries and the Internet are full of information about every breed. When you have it narrowed down to a few breeds of dog that appeal to you for various reasons, contact several breeders. Ask about their breed's peculiar characteristics. Are they runners like Labs and Golden Retrievers? Do they shed? If so, how much and when? Some breeds like Malamutes and Elkhounds shed seasonally – others lose hair constantly.

How are they with children? Are they barkers? Do they like water like Newfies and other retrieving breeds? How large will they grow?

Some breeds have specific health problems. Ask about those. Make sure any breeding stock has been OFA'd, meaning their hips have been x-rayed for soundness. You may ask for copies of these certificates and also of pedigrees.

Is there a coat to be maintained? Some breeds like Bichons need frequent scissoring to look correct. Go to dog shows when you see them advertised. This is an excellent opportunity to see all the breeds being exhibited, and you will have time to talk to the breeders. Ask the breeders for references, so you can hear owners' experiences with these breeders and their stock.

Inquire about health guarantees and what would happen if you could no longer keep the pet for some reason or another.

NEVER assume your decision to choose a pet for someone else. And don't think of trendy animals. After the movie 101 Dalmatians, the shelters became full of discarded animals. Dalmatians are not good dogs for kids. Obviously the movie made thousands of people select this breed with disastrous consequences for both the animals and purchasers.

Now Golden Retrievers are the yuppy puppy. This trend has gone through Dobermans, then Rotties and now Golden Retrievers. What this means is that everyone who can put together a breeding pair does so to make money, disregarding the health and temperament issues involved in these breedings. And then the breed gets a bad reputation from these back yard breeders who were only in it for the dollars.

There are many reputable breeders who will gladly educate you about their breed by giving you information or having you visit their establishments. This is the way to go.

And NEVER select a pet store puppy no matter how sad or needy they look. These are from puppy mills and to purchase them you are encouraging the production of more puppies from these sources. These animals usually have any number of health problems. But when you have taken the animal home and grown to love it, you will bear almost any expense to make it whole.

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