

So you want to breed your dog?

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Good for you for looking for more information! You can never have enough. Be sure you also have a vet and at least one other experienced dog breeder you can call at any hour, because most litters are born in the middle of the night! ☺ If a problem arises, you may need help and answers quickly. So plan ahead.

People who love dogs definitely need more reputable, ethical and educated breeders that are producing healthy dogs with sound temperaments! Too many people get into breeding without researching and understanding what they are getting into. Maybe the female is not spayed and had an accidental mating and now the person is scrambling to try to make the best of it. Maybe they think a litter will be some easy money or that their kids need to witness the miracle of birth. Or maybe they want another dog just like the one they have. If these are among your reasons for having a litter, please read on! You don't want to be surprised later when it's too late to change anything.



Being a reputable and ethical breeder involves education. As a breeder, you will be looked upon as a source of knowledge about the breed and as a resource for the owners of the puppies you produce. So before you produce puppies, you should know the answers to the common questions people have about your breed, as well as the answers to questions responsible owners will ask you if they are considering getting one of your puppies. And you should have help and advice for the buyers of your puppies for the rest of those dog's lives. Often puppy buyers that are new to dogs or your breed will contact their breeder first when they have a health or training question. Many breeders create a "puppy packet" of information to send home with each puppy.

You want to educate yourself about proper care of the female dog so she can be healthy enough to raise her pups. This takes a lot of energy, so she should be in great shape and fully healthy before she is bred. You'll also need to know what the pups will need at each stage of their life. There are things they will need even before they are born! And once they are born, you might not be getting much sleep. :-) For at least the first week, you'll need to be very close to the mother to be sure she is properly nursing and cleaning the pups (not all dogs know how or are willing to do this, or she might have more pups than she has teats, so it might become your job to feed/clean them every 2-4 hours!) Do you have help that can give you a break? You'll need to monitor their health too. Some conditions can take a pup from seemingly healthy to dead in just hours. You'll want to mark each pup in some way, like a different color ribbon collar, so you can keep records of their order/time of birth, health, vaccinations, worming, daily weight and any neurological stimulation you do with the pups. You'll be doing a lot of cleaning and as they grow, puppy wrangling as you get them from their pen to the yard to other play areas for them to explore while keeping them safe and out of trouble. They will need to be gently exposed to many different things (sights, sounds, smells, and tactile stimulation, etc.) as well as people of all ages, races and sizes so they will be less likely to become fearful dogs. Raising a litter can be a full time job, so be sure you have set aside time off work and don't plan any long trips for about 9 weeks around the time the pups are due unless you have people you trust to care for the mom and pups while you are away.

You'll want to be sure you know about any health issues within your own dog, the dog you plan to pair her with as well as those dog's parents and grandparents. You are not doing anyone a favor, especially the dogs, if you produce dogs that will have expensive health conditions. Know what health concerns are common in your breed and if those are present, please do the dog world a favor and DON'T produce more dogs likely to have those problems.

Some of the health concerns you should look for include: Thyroid problems, EPI, Dysplasia of hips, elbows and/or knees, eye diseases, heart problems, deafness and brucellosis. Most of these have tests that can be done to see if the dog has or carries the genes for these issues. The male and female to be paired should each be tested. The parents and grandparents also should HAVE been tested. This information should be provided by the stud dog owner and the breeder of your dog. If the parents and grandparents health are unknown, you are gambling with the health of the puppies. Several of these conditions can be life threatening

or debilitating. For example, brucellosis is a bacterium that can be transmitted to humans and can cause decreased fertility or abortion of the litter late in the pregnancy. It can cause infection of the spine and lead to paralysis. Infection may not have any symptoms in the adult, so only the test will determine if the dog is a carrier. Even with treatment, dogs testing positive for brucellosis are considered lifelong carriers and should be spayed/neutered. It can be transmitted by either the male or female dog, so both should be tested. Other conditions that can be passed along genetically include allergies, seizures, problems with infections and skin problems just to name a few.

You also need to look at temperament. Tendencies toward aggression can be quickly amplified by a poor mating. Training can hide some of this, so be very careful. Aggression can be a very costly and sometimes deadly condition for dogs to have. Dogs that guard their things, are quick to growl or snap, and/or that can't interact with other dogs have tendencies toward aggression that shouldn't be passed along. You may be fine at handling your dog's "quirks" but others might be more likely to take their growling dog to the pound or pass the problem off to someone else. If your dog or the dog she is going to be bred to is fearful of certain normal things (loud noises, new people, new places, etc.), that also shouldn't be put in the gene pool and can be amplified in the off-spring. If you have used training to overcome these issues in your dog, that doesn't change the genetic make-up of the dog. It's genetics that are passed along, not the training. There are plenty of dogs that have naturally stable, friendly temperaments. No matter how beautiful or capable you think your dog is, the world does not need more fearful and/or aggressive dogs to end up as statistics, in shelters or dogs that can't leave their house.

And just because you have found the perfect dog for your female doesn't mean she will agree with you (or that the male will not be aggressive toward her). In which case, if you still want the two to pair up, it will involve artificial insemination. The perfect mate might not be in your area. So you may need to do some travelling or have your dog stay with the male or have the male stay with you until you are sure the coupling has taken place.

You'll want to educate yourself on what to expect when your dog gives birth so you will have the needed supplies and know how to recognize complications vs. normal birthing. Be ready for a mess. Keep in mind this is most likely to occur in the wee hours of the night, when you haven't gotten much sleep. Are you prepared to see the mother dog in pain and distress? Pacing, whining, panting, and crying out? Can you handle getting yourself bloody and slimy with birth material if the mother needs your help in delivering and cleaning the pups? Can you handle the thought of the mother dog eating all that goo along with the placenta of each pup, the possibility that the mother might try to eat her pups, or that a pup could be born dead or deformed? What if a puppy has a life threatening defect and needs to be put to sleep? Or the mother dog accidentally lays on a puppy and kills it (this is a common problem and the reason a special whelping box needs to be used, though it's still no guarantee.) And then there is the possibility that the mother dog could have complications and die. Giving birth is not always as easy or as beautiful as one might think.



Then there is the money issue. You need to be realistic in whether or not you can afford to have a litter. Most ethical and responsible breeders are breeding dogs because they want to produce high quality dogs that will be healthy, with great temperaments that can excel at whatever the new owners wish to do with the dog. If they break even, or make a little profit, that's icing on the cake. Several of the expenses will need to be paid up front because in most cases, people don't start placing deposits till the female is confirmed pregnant and an ultrasound gives an indication of how many puppies there might be. Making money should not be the top priority because there are no guarantees. There are no certainties of the size of a

litter. It could be only 1 or 2 pups will be born and one or more puppies with health issues or complications during pregnancy/delivery can quickly drain any hope of a profit as well.

Raising a litter responsibly is expensive. "Cutting costs" is even more expensive, in the long run. The following things are just some of the costs involved:

- Health testing and screening to make sure the dogs involved (and their parents/grandparents) are free from hereditary diseases
- Stud fees
- Extra food (of high quality) for the mother while pregnant and nursing. The health of the mother during pregnancy and nursing can affect the puppies for the rest of their lives.
- Ultrasounds to see if she is pregnant and then later to see how many puppies to expect (so you know all have been delivered and how many deposits to collect).
- Medical check-ups for the mother
- All the supplies needed for the birth and care of the puppies (Whelping box, medical supplies, towels/sheets, heat lamp, etc.)
- Funds set aside for an emergency C-section or emergency medical care if things go wrong. This can be a common occurrence, so just plan for it to happen (in the middle of the night) so you are ready.
- Medical care for the puppies (inoculations, worming, health tests, other vet care, etc.) This could be very expensive if any of the puppies are not healthy.
- Food for the puppies (formula if mom isn't feeding them and puppy food once they are weaned and until a good home is found)
- At least a week off of work to monitor and help mom care for the newborns (longer if you need to do it yourself because she isn't)
- Microchip or tattoo for each pup in case they end up in a shelter later in life
- Registration fees if the pups will have "papers"
- Toys and enrichment items for the puppies to explore
- Advertisements to get puppy buyers
- Time spent raising the litter, keeping detailed records, taking lots of photos/video and talking to potential puppy buyers while dealing with the demands of everyday life, like sleeping for a few minutes and eating occasionally. :-)

And the above is assuming that all pups are sold and go to their new homes at 8 or 9 weeks of age. Until you have their money, don't assume people will follow through with payment when they tell you they would love to have a puppy from your dog. If a buyer changes their mind or you don't find buyers, guess who keeps the pups? Are you prepared to add multiple, high energy, chewing and pooping puppies to your household that you will need to continue to socialize, train, provide health care for and feed?

And the job of the breeder doesn't end when the puppies go to their new homes. If you are a responsible, ethical and educated breeder, then you have in the purchase contract that you will take that puppy back for any reason at any point in its life. The dog develops a health issue the owners don't want to or can't afford to handle? You take the dog back. Dog develops an aggression problem and it can't stay in the home with their kids? You take the dog back. The owners are moving overseas and can't take the dog, yup, you take the dog back! After spending so much time making sure you pick just the right healthy mate for your dog, caring for her and raising the litter, you should care about the offspring for the rest of their lives. You will want to screen potential buyers to be sure they are going to give the pup a safe, loving, lifetime home. Educate them about what they are getting into (good and potentially bad) so they aren't caught unaware and wanting to return the border collie because it has a lot of energy or the mastiff because it got so big or the terrier because it digs and chases critters.



The above assumes everything goes relatively smoothly. I urge you to read this website <http://www.woodhavenlabs.com/breeding/breeder3.html> which has several letters from breeders about what they experienced. Learn from them so you can be prepared and know what signs to watch for. It could save you lots of heartache!

If you have read this, and still want to breed and plan to do it responsibly- thank-you! As I said at the beginning, we need more people willing to take on this monumental task with just the right dogs. If you have read this and are now reconsidering, all might not be lost on fulfilling the reasons you wanted to breed your dog.

If you want your kids to see the miracle of birth, you can watch live streaming video on <http://www.ustream.tv/> It might not be a bad idea to watch this even if you still plan to breed! You could ask at your local shelter to see if any pregnant dogs are in foster care with people willing to have you help with the birth of the puppies. Just be sure you are helping and not getting in the way! You might also want to foster a litter of newborns from the shelter to get experience. As far as educating the kids, teaching them to be responsible, ethical and well educated should be high on your list. The actual birth is only a tiny part of life and being responsible for lives you bring into the world.

If you want another dog just like the one you have, get another puppy from your dog's parents. Even that doesn't guarantee anything, but it's a better shot than mixing in the genes of another dog with your dog's genes. Dogs do not produce carbon copies! Even within a single litter, the diversity of temperament, health, markings, structure and more can be vastly different.

Hopefully you now have a better understanding of all the work and money that goes into producing a litter of quality puppies and finding them all the perfect homes. But this is just the very tip of the iceberg! There is much more for you to learn. So talk to your vet, your dog's breeder, other breeders, and read through the information on the Dog Scouts of America website. Our dog's lives are much shorter than our own; let's help them enjoy their time with us as much as we can.

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