Your Guide to Finding a Responsible Breeder

Choosing a responsible breeder is the most important step in finding a healthy, well-adjusted Golden Retriever puppy. Reputable breeders are dedicated to preserving the AKC Golden Retriever standard and temperament. They carefully plan their breeding programs with the goal of producing healthy puppies that represent the best qualities of the Golden Retriever.

Responsible breeding takes time, care, and commitment. Many quality breeders have only one or two litters a year. Unlike puppy mills, responsible breeders prioritize the health and well-being of their dogs over the number of puppies they produce.

Be prepared to wait for the right puppy. Ethical breeders often plan litters in advance, maintain waiting lists, and thoughtfully match puppies with families. Rather than breeding simply to meet demand, they make deliberate decisions to support the long-term health and quality of the breed.

Plan for an investment

A well-bred Golden Retriever puppy typically will cost approximately $3,000 or more. While the initial cost is an important consideration, health, temperament, responsible breeding practices, and the support a breeder provides during the lifetime of a puppy should be equally important in your decision.

Finding the right Golden Retriever may take patience, but a thoughtful start can help set the stage for a happy, healthy life together!

Contracts

Breeders should provide a written sales contract for all of their puppies that details responsibilities of both the buyer and the breeder. Be sure to read and discuss the contract before committing to buying a puppy, and don't sign anything that you don't understand or intend to follow.

Health Certifications from the Orthopedic Foundation of Animals (OFA)

The Golden Retriever Club of America's Code of Ethics strongly recommends that all breeding dogs have examinations by appropriate veterinary specialists who issue health certifications indicating that the dog does not have hip or elbow dysplasia, and heritable heart or eye diseases.

It's wise to verify that the sire and dam have these certifications by asking for their registration numbers and using the QuickSearch feature at https://ofa.org/advancedsearch/.

Guarantees

No matter how carefully a breeding is planned, there are always disease risks. The best assurance of a healthy puppy lies in selection of the breeder, 3-5 generations of health certifications, and your own preventive health care for the puppy. Reputable and honest breeders will voluntarily admit to a buyer any potential health risks within their breeding dogs or their dog's pedigree.

AKC Limited Registration

Companion or Pet puppies are usually provided with Limited Registration, which mainly implies that the breeder does not want this dog ever bred and that litters produced by such a dog would not be eligible for AKC registration.

Spay/Neuter Contracts

It's often recommended by many veterinarians that dogs are to be spayed/neutered around 6 months of age, but research has shown that there is a mix of health benefits and risks associated with early spaying/neutering (prior to 12 months of age) versus later (over 12 months). Breeders will typically advise neutering a male around 18 months and spaying a female 3 months after her first season.

Co-Ownerships

It's possible that a breeder might offer a co-ownership on a puppy, which is sometimes done if the breeder feels the puppy has potential for earning titles or for breeding. This is not usually recommended for owners who do not themselves have an interest in competition or breeding. While it is true that co-owning offer benefits, they will also include obligations that may continue for several years. Before agreeing to a coownership, carefully review the terms, understand each party's responsibilities, and consider whether the arrangement fits your long-term plans for your dog.

Lifetime Commitment

Good breeders are committed to the puppy's well-being for its lifetime, and they can be wonderful ongoing resources to answer questions and provide useful advice.

Breeders appreciate a call when problems are minor so they can help owners avoid major concerns, and they often have useful preventive health care tips that can save trips to the vet. Finding a knowledgeable breeder with whom you have good rapport and who wants to spend time teaching you about Goldens is almost as important as the selection of the litter.

Finally, committed breeders remain available to assist in finding an appropriate placement for a dog at any time during its life for any reason or if your circumstances change and this becomes necessary.

Checklist 1: Questions to Ask the Breeder

Health & Certifications

- **OFA Verification:** Confirm hip, elbow, eye, and heart certifications for both parents at offa.org (Need Sire and Dam AKC Registration numbers).
- **Vet Exams:** Check if a veterinarian examines puppies and if they receive their first vaccinations before they go to their new home.
- **Lineage Health:** Screen parents and first-degree relatives for hereditary conditions including:
  - **Temperament:** Fear, aggression, anxiety, or severe hyperactivity.
  - **Skin/Allergies:** Chronic skin or ear infections, itching, or licking stains.
  - **Digestion:** Chronic loose stools or food sensitivities.
  - **Neurology:** Seizures, epilepsy.
  - **Eyes/Genetic:** Pigmentary uveitis (PU), Juvenile Cataract, Ichthyosis, or Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) blindness.

Experience & Practices

- **Breeding History:** Ask about their total years breeding and number of litters per year.
- **Socialization:** Ask how they socialize puppies during early development.
- **Home Visit:** Arrange a personal visit to meet the dogs and view where pups are raised.

Contracts & Affiliations

- **Written Contract:** Request a copy of the sales contract to review in advance.
- **Club Memberships:** Confirm active membership in the GRCA or local dog clubs.

Checklist 2: Questions the Breeder May Ask You

Home & Lifestyle

- **Time Commitment:** Confirm you can dedicate the time and energy to a new puppy.
- **Initial Supervision:** Ensure someone is home frequently during the first month.
- **Household Setup:** Provide details on children's ages and their comfort with large dogs,
- and yard fencing.
- **Current Pets:** Share your dog-owning history and current household pets.

Training & Care

- **Daily Exercise:** Explain your daily exercise plan for an adult Golden Retriever.
- **Crate Training:** State your plans for crating the puppy when unsupervised.
- **Obedience/Socialization Classes:** Confirm plans for basic obedience training.
- **Puppy Match:** Define your ideal dog energy level (high, medium, low) and family activities.

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