

Before I get into the rest of the article, let me answer the question asked in the title, “Which is better, breeder or shelter?” ...the answer is neither and both. The reality is that it all depends on what a person or a family is looking for when they are looking for a puppy/dog. Do you have time to deal with a puppy? Do you have the funds necessary to adopt a pure-bred dog from a reputable breeder? Does knowing the lineage, health, and personality of the puppy/dog matter to you? Do you have the funds to pay for vet bills that may become necessary when adopting a dog that has no known history?

There are pros and cons on both sides of the argument. Right now, you may be ready to bring a puppy/dog home from a shelter because you are at the point in your life that this is the right answer for you. On the other hand, you may have always wanted a certain breed of dog, or you have had your heart broken by a bad adoption experience and you are ready to get a dog from a breeder. Neither answer is wrong, both are good. Also, it is possible to have both purebred dogs and rescued dogs in your home...I do.

Words for Thought

In all reality, choosing where to find your next dog is a deeply personal decision. Many people struggle with whether to adopt from a shelter or work with a breeder. Sadly, the controversy concerning using one or the other has become increasingly emotional in recent years. As someone who has bred dogs for more than twenty-five years - and who has also run a registered rescue - I have seen both sides up close. My goal is to offer clarity, facts, and perspective so you can make the choice that is right for you.

The Truth About Reputable Breeding

Responsible breeding is not a profitable business. The cost of caring for adult dogs, providing proper nutrition, veterinary care, health testing, housing, and raising puppies far outweighs any financial return. Most reputable breeders reinvest nearly everything back into their dogs.

So why do we do it? We love our breed and want to preserve its health, temperament, and traits. The delight when a family comes to pick up their new fur-baby is amazing. Sharing this moment with people is one of the greatest joys in the world. Responsible breeding is demanding, exhausting, and expensive—but it is also incredibly rewarding.

The Stigma Around Breeders

In recent years, the word “breeder” has taken on a negative tone. Common comments include:

- “People should adopt.”
- “Breeders are only in it for the money.”
- “Adopt, don’t shop.”

- "You should save a life instead of supporting a breeder."
- "Breeders are the reason that shelters are full."
- "When breeders breed, they are killing other dogs."

These statements come from a place of emotion, not fact. Yes, there *are* puppy mills, irresponsible backyard breeders, and irresponsible owners that allow their dogs to breed by "accident." The reality is these, and those who get puppies from these people, are what cause the shelters to fill up. The responsible breeders are not the problem.

This is where there is an injustice. Not ALL breeders are the same. Nonetheless, many people consider those irresponsible breeders when they are thinking about breeders in general. Just as in any profession, the existence of bad actors does not define the entire field. What some do not understand is there are also dedicated, ethical breeders who prioritize health, temperament, and responsible placement.

What Responsible Breeders Do

Reputable breeders:

- Raise dogs indoors as part of the family.
- Provide consistent veterinary care.
- Health test breeding dogs
- Socialize puppies from birth.
- Ensure puppies receive proper nutrition and early care.
- Carefully screen potential homes
- Require contracts and offer lifelong support.
- Take back any dog, at any age, for any reason.
- Microchip puppies and maintain secondary registration.
- Guarantee their puppies' health against breed-specific issues.

Because of these practices, puppies from reputable breeders rarely, if ever, end up in shelters.

Breeders Are Not Opposed to Shelters

Many breeders - including myself - adopt, rehabilitate, or foster rescue dogs. Before having children, I ran a registered rescue specializing in rehabilitating dogs with behavioral challenges. I

worked closely with shelters in New Braunfels and San Antonio, taking in dogs considered unadoptable.

Breeders are not “anti-shelter.” We simply recognize that shelters are not the only answer, and that responsible breeding plays an important role in the long-term health and availability of pure-bred dogs.

Do Breeders Contribute to Shelter Overpopulation?

Ethical breeders do not. Puppy mills, backyard breeders, and irresponsible owners do.

In more than twenty-five years, only one of my dogs has ever ended up in a shelter—and I picked it up immediately. Reputable breeders take precautions to ensure their dogs never enter the shelter system.

Why Some People Choose Purebred Dogs

Purebred dogs offer predictability in:

- Size
- Temperament
- Coat type
- Activity level
- Health testing
- Behavioral traits

For many families, this predictability is essential. Others want to meet the puppy’s parents, understand its background, or ensure the puppy has had a healthy, trauma-free start.

Additionally, purebred dogs are often necessary for specialized work such as:

- Service and guide dogs.
- Police and military dogs.
- Therapy dogs.
- Hunting and field work.

These roles require dogs with known temperaments and clean behavioral histories which is something shelters cannot always provide.

Health and Early Life Matter

Unfortunately, shelters do their best, but they cannot guarantee:

- A dog's background
- Early socialization
- Genetic health
- Past trauma
- Breed accuracy

Reputable breeders can. Puppies raised in a stable, loving environment from birth have a "clean slate," which often leads to easier training, fewer behavioral issues, and a smoother transition into family life.

Cost Differences: Why Breeder Puppies Cost More

Shelters receive donations, grants, and government support. Breeders do not.

Breeders personally cover:

- Veterinary care for both parents and puppies
- Health testing
- Food and supplements
- Housing and supplies
- Whelping and neonatal care
- Vaccinations and deworming
- Transportation
- Training and socialization

The price of a well-bred puppy reflects the cost of responsible care—not profit.

What to Look for in a Reputable Breeder

A reputable breeder will:

1. Prioritize maintaining the traits of the breed.
2. Put health and temperament first.
3. Screen homes carefully.

4. Use contracts.
5. Provide lifelong support.
6. Raise puppies indoors.
7. Avoid chaining, caging, or outdoor-only housing.
8. Require return of the dog if original adopters need to rehome the dog.
9. Guarantee health
10. Provide veterinary care before placement.
11. Vaccinate and deworm appropriately.
12. Allow you to meet the dam and sire.
13. Show pedigrees and health testing.
14. Avoid selling to pet stores or through online puppy brokers.
15. Never send puppies home before 8 weeks

Warning Signs of an Irresponsible Breeder

- Requires that they meet you somewhere "neutral" to pick up the puppy (like a gas station/Wal-Mart)
- Will not allow adopter's to meet puppy parents at pickup.
- Minimizes genetic issues.
- Keeps dogs in kennels or outdoor runs.
- Has USDA licensing for pet store sales.
- Sells puppies unusually cheap.
- Advertises "rare" colors for extra money.
- Does not do any genetic testing.
- Has no guarantee or a 24-72 hour guarantee.
- Requires you to take your new puppy to the vet for a checkup within 24 hours (because the pup has never seen a vet).
- Will allow separation from the dam and/or all littermates before the age of 8 weeks.

Shelter or Breeder: It is Your Choice

There is no “one right answer.” Both options can be wonderful.

Some families adopt from shelters. Some choose a reputable breeder. Many do both.

What matters is that you make the choice that fits your needs, your lifestyle, and your heart—without guilt or pressure from others.

It is obvious that all dogs deserve love, whether they come from a rescue or a breeder.

About the Author

My experience with animals spans my entire life. I spent several years working as a veterinary technician, operated a registered dog rescue from 2007–2011, and have been a dedicated breeder since 1996. I remain committed to ongoing research in canine health and care, and as a college professor, I value every opportunity to share knowledge with others. My greatest fulfillment comes from my family, my dogs, and the families who welcome my puppies into their homes.

Disclaimer: The information provided on this website is not written by a veterinarian or a certified animal nutritionist. I am a breeder who cares for my dogs, has done thousands of hours of research, and has learned from trial and error. I have chosen to share this information with you. Nevertheless, you must make your own decisions. If you choose to follow noted recommendations, then that is your choice. Regency Ranch and/or its representatives hold no liability.

Sources:

“ASPCapro.” *ASPCA Professional*, 2 July 2019, www.aspcapro.org/. Accessed 7 Aug 2019.