

Excerpt reprinted and modified for Cocker Spaniels with permission. You may read the full article at <http://www.grca.org/acquiring.htm>

Choosing a Responsible Breeder

Before you even start looking at litters of puppies, take time to learn about the breed. Attend dog shows and field trials, Spaniel club meetings, and local kennel club meetings, and talk with and question Cocker Spaniel owners. They are proud of their dogs and are happy to share their enthusiasm.



Look around. It is much easier to find a puppy mill or backyard breeder that knows and cares little about the welfare of the breed than it is to find a responsible breeder. Have patience and never buy impulsively . . . all puppies are cute. The American Spaniel Club, Inc. (<http://www.asc-cockerspaniel.org>), and many of its local member clubs can supply you with a list of conscientious breeders in your area who will help you in your search even though they may not have anything for sale themselves.

Choosing a responsible breeder is very important. Since it would be almost impossible for you to know what the puppy you are buying will grow up to be physically and emotionally, you must rely on your faith in the person from whom you are purchasing your puppy. There are three options open to you in choosing this person.

Pet Shop or Dealer

The worst possible choice. The puppies are poorly bred and raised. They are thought of as merchandise to be sold for a high profit. The high profit results because little has been put into the breeding or the care of the puppies. Many are sickly. Pet shops rely heavily on impulse buying, which is no way to choose an addition to the family.

Backyard Breeder

Also a poor choice. This is the person who owns a pet Cocker and thinks it would be fun to have puppies, that it would be a great experience for the children, or that the bitch should be bred once before she is spayed. Even worse,

perhaps it's being done just to make money. Usually this breeder knows little about the standard or history of the breed, and still less about proper care. The backyard breeder is not aware of breed problems, and doesn't care. This person's only goal is to produce puppies, and when the fun is over, to sell them quickly.

Serious Hobby Breeder

The very best choice. The serious and dedicated hobby breeder regards his/her dogs as even more than a hobby, although the true fancier does not expect to make a profit. When someone is involved in dogs for the enjoyment of each individual animal, for participating in any of the many aspects of dogsport, and for producing the finest animals possible, the results are SUPERIOR. The best breeders acknowledge responsibility for each and every puppy produced, and stand behind every dog they have bred.

Unequivocally, your choice should be from the ranks of the SERIOUS HOBBY BREEDER. It is an interesting fact that poor quality puppies from pet shops and backyard breeders are often sold for the same price and sometimes even more than those purchased from the experienced hobby breeder. The question is: How does one recognize the responsible breeder? Presented below is a list of requirements the breeder should meet before you consider purchasing a puppy. Don't be afraid to confront the breeder with these requirements. It is your right, and you can rest assured that the dedicated breeder will respond positively and with pride.

The breeder should:

1. Belong to The American Spaniel Club, Inc. (<http://www.asc-cockerspaniel.org>), a local Spaniel club, or an all-breed club. Ideally he/she should belong to all three; however, sometimes this is impossible. The reason for this requirement is that this sort of participation indicates depth of involvement. This breeder is exposed to other points of view, learns more about the breed and modern breeding practices, and is kept up to date on AKC rules and regulations.
2. Be involved in showing his/her dogs in the breed ring, the obedience ring, in hunting tests/field trials, agility, tracking, or in a combination of any of these. The reason for this requirement is that it means that the breeder is not working in a vacuum. The breeder who does not participate has no idea how good his/her dogs really are, and is deprived of the opportunity to share information and ideas with others. Showing provides the

competition which encourages breeders to produce better dogs. The breeder who competes wants to prove how good his/her dogs are and is putting his/her breeding program on the line. This breeder is not relying on just a pedigree to indicate quality. Even if you do not want a competition animal, you deserve a companion that is the end result of a carefully planned litter; a puppy which received the same care as a potential champion. The breeder who competes in organized activities is known by others and has a reputation to uphold. This breeder will be as careful and honest in selling you your pet puppy as in selling show stock.

3. Be able to show you a clean environment; healthy, well-socialized puppies; and a dam with a good temperament. You should avoid: a) shy, whimpering, fearful puppies; b) puppies with dull coats, crusty or running eyes, signs of diarrhea, rashes or sores on their abdomens; c) signs of neglect, such as lack of water, pans of uneaten food, and dirty conditions; d) a breeder who will sell a puppy under seven weeks of age, as early separation from the dam and littermates can be very detrimental both psychologically and physically.
4. Give you a period of time in which to allow you to have the puppy examined by a veterinarian to determine its state of health, so that both of you are assured as to the condition of the puppy at the time of sale. If a problem should arise, it can then be quickly resolved.
5. Provide you with a record of the dates and types of vaccinations and deworming done, feeding instructions, a 3-to 5-generation pedigree, and an AKC registration application to apply for registration of the puppy in your own name with the American Kennel Club (AKC). Sometimes the registration application is not available at the time you take your puppy home. If this is the case, have the breeder state on a dated, signed receipt of payment that the application will be sent to you as soon as possible. The registered names and AKC numbers of both parents, date of birth of the litter, and puppy's color and sex should be indicated. You can then contact AKC with complete information should there later be a problem with the papers.
6. Give you written instructions on feeding, training and care.
7. Be able to **show you proof** that both the sire and dam of the litter have had their hips X-rayed, and evaluated as normal by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) and/or PennHIP; have had their elbows X-rayed and evaluated as normal by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or a board-certified veterinary radiologist: have had their hearts

- examined by a board-certified veterinary cardiologist; and have had their eyes examined by a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist within the last 12-18 months. The breeder should also be willing to answer your questions about any other possible hereditary problems, including but not limited to seizures, hypothyroidism, and skin problems or allergies.
8. Ask you what kind of dogs you have had in the past, and what happened to them; whether or not you have a fenced yard; and whether or not the dog will be allowed to be a house dog and a member of the family. Sincere breeders will be a bit hesitant to sell you a puppy until they know more about you, what you are looking for in a dog, and what lifestyle you have in mind for your dog. Having the best interest of the puppy at heart, responsible breeders will take great pains to place puppies properly the first time around. A returned puppy is a traumatic experience for all concerned, so the breeder who is always willing to accept a puppy back will try to make certain that a Cocker is the breed for you.
 9. Be able to give you references: the names of people who have purchased puppies in the past, the names of other breeders, and the veterinarian who provides care for the breeder's dogs.
 10. Provide some sort of written contract and/or conditions of sale. Any warranty of quality or health of the dog, and any warranty against development of hereditary problems or show-ring disqualifications in an animal intended for showing or breeding, should be in writing. The warranty should be absolutely explicit and a signed copy should be provided to each party.
 11. Both pedigree and registration papers are provided by responsible breeders at NO extra charge. The practice of charging extra for papers is forbidden by the AKC, and should be reported. This should not be confused with withholding papers until the dog has been spayed or neutered, which is how puppies not purchased for showing/breeding are sold by many responsible breeders.
 12. Make it clear that his/her responsibility continues long after you have taken your puppy home, in fact as long as the dog is alive. Many dedicated breeders will ask that the dog be returned to them, or placed with new owners who meet their approval, if ever for any reason you are unable to keep the dog. They'll cheerfully be available for advice whenever needed, and can ease your way over many rough spots. If your breeder meets all of these requirements you are in good hands. If you find yourself with a negative response to any of these requirements,

think twice and discuss the situation with someone else. DON'T be impulsive and DO ask questions.

Credits:

GOLDEN RETRIEVER, Excerpted from AN INTRODUCTION TO THE GOLDEN RETRIEVER,
by The Golden Retriever Club of America, Inc. Education Committee

WRITTEN BY: Michele Biglen, Linda Copti, Marcia Schlehr
EDITED BY: Sharon Bolton, Melissa Goodman, Joyce Kinghom
ILLUSTRATED BY: Marcia Schlehr

With thanks to Cynthia Morse and the Bull Terrier Club of America, the Doberman Pinscher Club of America, the Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier Club of America, and several GRCA member clubs for some of their ideas and material.

© **GRCA, INC. 1985, 1992, 1998, 2003**

August, 1985.
Reprinted February, 1988
Revised, Reprinted October, 1992
Revised, Reprinted March, 1998
Revised, Reprinted September, 2003