

Backyard Breeding and the Hidden Harm

Dr. Mercedes Ng BSc BVMS

Since starting at Dardanup Veterinary Centre I've had a few clients ask me about breeding their dogs. Many people don't realise that breeding dogs responsibly requires a great deal of knowledge, time, money and experience. While it would be impossible for me to cover all the considerations that should be contemplated prior to deciding to be a responsible breeder in one article, I will try to cover some key information here.

Before deciding to breed, be prepared to,

- Accept the health risks (reproductive cancers and infections) and behavioural downfalls (heats, inappropriate urination, aggression, roaming) of having an unsterilized pet. A female sterilised before her first heat has a 0.5% chance of mammary cancer whereas leaving a female pet unsterilized puts her at a 26% risk of mammary cancer.
- Accept the potentially life threatening health risks of birthing complications to your pet.
- Accept that it is unethical to bring more puppies into a world of pet overpopulation, where puppies are put to sleep in shelters and many dogs are already looking for homes, unless you're aiming to improve the health of the breed. For every puppy bred and rehomed, a puppy in the shelter misses out on a home.
- Accept the responsibility and cost of ensuring your dogs have no health or behavioural problems that can be passed on. Understand that the love for your pet may make you blind to their faults or perhaps you can accept them, but do not breed shy or boisterous dogs and always have your pet vet checked. This includes necessary health testing to prevent high-risk diseases identified in your dogs breed. Ideally this will be done for the parents of the mother and father as well. It is irresponsible to breed without testing for genetic health issues and leaving your puppies at risk of preventable diseases.
- Have the financial means to pay for routine costs associated with breeding such as genetic testing, good quality puppy biscuits, equipment, pregnancy and puppy health checks, vaccinations, fortnightly worming, microchipping prior to sale. Routine costs alone can be around \$2,000 a litter without even considering the possibility of emergency veterinary bills that can be in the thousands.
- Have the experience (and time) necessary to recognise signs of a difficult labour, be able to handraise the entire litter if necessary, be able to raise the puppies so they are healthy, well handled, socialised and trained, and be able to select appropriate forever homes for the puppies by interviewing all potential homes. Be prepared for taking time off work and many sleepless nights!
- Accept lifelong responsibility for the puppies you brought into the world. This involves providing new owners ongoing support and advice as well as accepting any puppies that are returned at any point to prevent them ending up in the shelter system.

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Disclaimer

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Deciding to breed should be an informed decision which is made with your pet's best interest as your first priority. Most people make the decision to breed simply because they love their pet and want others to experience their joy. The sad reality is that the offspring may be completely different and although your pet is lovely, most pets are, and so are pets waiting to be rehomed. Your pet does not need to have a litter to be happy so perhaps consider fostering a litter of puppies from the local shelter, leave the breeding to the professionals and enjoy your dog as a much loved pet.

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