



MIDFOREST

veterinary practice

So, you've made the decision to add a puppy to your family. You've scoured the library and picked the perfect breed – or at least narrowed it down to a select few. Now the most important step to finding the perfect pet has come – choosing you puppy.

When looking for a litter of puppies, be they purebred or “Heinz 57”, make sure you will be able to meet the parents. While often Dad may be from far away, or in crossbreeds unknown, Mum should be on site. This provides a good opportunity to have an idea what the pup may be like at adulthood, and also lets you know how well he's been cared for. Mum should be friendly, used to people, and in good physical condition. Naturally after nursing a litter for several weeks she may not be at her best, but you should be able to get a good idea of the care she and pups have been receiving. Purebred animals should have been screened for common genetic diseases of the breed, such as hip scoring in large breeds – and certification of this should be available on request. The breeder should be more than happy to provide this information and answer any questions – reluctance to do so is a sign to look elsewhere for a pup. Litters being shown without Mum, particularly if they've been brought in from another location, should be viewed with scepticism. Their source could be a high volume breeding farm where very little individual attention is paid to the pups or their breeding, and the chances of serious genetic problems and contagious infections are much greater in such puppies.

The puppies in the litter should be clean and kept in clean premises. Puppies should be free of runny eyes and noses, and there should be no coughing or sneezing or signs of diarrhoea under their tails. Healthy puppies are active and well-proportioned with clean shiny coats. Lethargic or thin pups with dull fur may be a sign of poor care or illness in the litter. Ideally puppies should have been wormed and depending on the age of the litter may have had their first vaccination. Puppies should never be offered for sale prior to 6 weeks of age and preferably not until 7-8 weeks. Some breeders prefer to keep them a bit later to start the vaccination process. NEVER agree to buy a puppy from the boot of a car or to meet the owner of the litter in a car park – these pups are almost certainly bred for profit with little attention to the well being of the puppies or the animals used for breeding. Resist the urge to “rescue” such a pup – for every puppy “saved” 10 more will be bred in its place, encouraged by the profits of the sale. If in doubt, walk away. There is a healthy puppy from a reputable source waiting for you elsewhere.

Once you have chosen a healthy litter, the difficult task of choosing a pup now faces you. However difficult, I encourage you to avoid the temptation to pick the first pup that runs up to you. While it is charming to think he's choosing you, the reality may be he's the most outgoing pup with a strong personality that may make training more challenging.

Likewise, the “runt” in the corner may suffer from shyness which may not be a good match for a busy family. A “middle of the road” pup is often the best choice, with the greatest chance of handling new situations in life easily. Many breeders feel it is important to help new owners pick their pup, as they have got to know the puppies’ temperaments and can match you with the pup best suited to your family and lifestyle.

Once you have picked your perfect pup, a trip to the vet for a full health examination is essential. This will ensure your pup is healthy and you can start a preventative health programme including vaccination and worming as well as get advice on diet and training for the coming year – the most important of what will hopefully be many happy years together for you and your new best friend.

Colleen Bray BSc DVM MRCVS is a veterinary surgeon at Midforest Veterinary Practice in Lyndhurst, and is thrilled to be providing veterinary services for the New Forest community. She is Canadian, and trained at the Ontario Veterinary College in Guelph, Ontario. She is married, and currently owned by her two Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, three cats and the practice ferret.