

Questions to ask a Breeder

Knowing and asking the right questions are critical to making an informed puppy selection decision. Although not a complete list, the following questions are an excellent starting point to help you become better informed about your breeder and the particular litter you are investigating. DO NOT plan to rattle through every question with every breeder. Instead, pick a couple of questions that are really important to you and start with them. Breeders will appreciate your well thought out questions. The only wrong way to buy a puppy is not to ask any questions at all.

1. The Breeder:

Are you a member of the LCA and if so, for how many years? Do you adhere to the LCA Member Practices which you can find available on the website.

Are you active in the club? Can you provide references for you and your dogs, ideally from previous puppy buyers, other breeders, or your veterinarian?

2. Availability:

Do you have puppies available right now? Are you expecting or planning a litter in the near future? Do you have a waiting list and if yes how long is it? What is the likelihood that I might be able to get a puppy from you? How do I proceed with reserving a puppy? Do you have a reservation contract? Do you have a questionnaire I should complete? If I place a deposit with you, under what conditions will/can my deposit be returned? Are you aware of other LCA breeders I might contact?

3. Breeding Program:

How long have you been a Leonberger breeder? How many dogs do you have? How often do you breed a litter of puppies? How many litters have you produced? How many litters have you bred this year? What is your main emphasis in your breeding program? What are your personal goals in your breeding program? Do you breed other breeds? Is breeding Leonbergers a full-time job, or a hobby? What can you tell me about the longevity background of the dogs in your pedigree? What is the oldest Leonberger you have produced? What have your dogs died of and at what ages?

4. Parents of Puppies:

Sire stats (AKC registered name, age, temperament, height, weight, etc.) and dam stats (AKC registered name, age, temperament, height, weight, etc.)? Can I see either or both parents in person? Do you have photographs of close relatives or do they even live with you? Can I have a copy of pedigrees on current and future litters? What titles (working, conformation), awards, have these dogs won/been awarded? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the sire and dam? Why did you decide to breed these two dogs? How many previous litters has the mother produced? How many litters has the father sired to date?

5. Hip & Elbow Dysplasia/OCD:

What can you tell me about the orthopedic background of the dogs in your pedigree (and siblings)? Are parents, aunts and uncles, half siblings and grandparents clear (for hips and elbows)? Statistically speaking, what have you been producing as far as clear orthopedics in your litters? Can you please send me the CHIC numbers for the parents of this breeding? All LCA dogs used in a breeding program must have been assigned a CHIC (canine health information center) number. Please note: **The acquisition of a CHIC number only indicates the dog has completed all of the required testing, not that they have passed any (or all) of the screenings.** After receiving the parents CHIC numbers from the breeder, it is highly suggested that you go to the CHIC site at: <http://www.caninehealthinfo.org/chicinfo.html> to confirm scores. This is quite easy, by going to the CHIC site and clicking on the tab "Search CHIC Dogs" then enter the given CHIC number (or registered name) and click "begin search". On the next page, click on the name of the dog you are searching. There, you should find results for the following LCA required tests: Hip Dysplasia, passing OFA hips (fair or better), Elbow Dysplasia, CERF eye examination, Autoimmune Thyroiditis, Leonberger Polyneuropathy (LPN1). At this time, congenital cardiac testing is optional. Please feel free to ask your breeder to explain any test results that concern you.

6. Other Health Issues:

Have there been reported cases of cancer in your line? If so, what type(s) and where in the pedigree has it occurred? Has either of the parents been assessed for thyroid problems? Had an OFA Cardiac evaluation? Bloat? Autoimmune Diseases? Allergies? Other? Are the parents certified free from hereditary eye disease, like cataracts? When was the last CERF examination? Have any puppies you bred had any of these problems? Remember, there are health issues in every line and there are no perfect dogs. It is important that the breeder is aware of those issues and has addressed them in his/her breeding decision. A breeder who says, "I do not have any health issues in my line", is either avoiding the issue or has not done enough research. Pages from the Leo Health Foundation (LHF) better explains some of the health testing and the importance of finding a breeder that adheres to them:

<http://leonbergerhealthfoundation.org/>

7. Contracts/Guarantees:

Will there be a contract? What is included? Can I have a copy of your contract to review? What guarantees are given under the contract? At what level does the guarantee come into effect, and who or what decides this? If there is a replacement puppy, what happens to the initial dog purchased? Do you (and if yes) how do you differentiate between pet and show quality puppies? Do you require spaying/neutering for pet quality pups? If so, at what age and what are my obligations?

8. Early Development Issues/Placement:

What type of temperaments are you aiming to produce? Do you temperament test? What do you do in raising puppies to help produce well-rounded temperaments? Have temperaments and working ability in your line been confirmed through obedience, draft, tracking or agility competition? At what age do you let your puppies go? What training will they come with? What will you provide for me in terms of information with the puppy? How involved as a breeder do you want to be in the raising of this puppy? Will he/she be crate trained when I get this puppy? What do you recommend (or not recommend) for

feeding the pups? When do you recommend switching to adult food? What vitamin supplements, if any, are recommended? Are your dogs kennel or house dogs? Are your puppies raised in the kennel or house? What do you do to socialize the pups? With people? With other dogs? Tell me your thoughts on immunization for this puppy. Elbow and hip certification? Will you keep a refundable deposit for health tests?

9. Socialization & Training

Socialization is the most important thing you will do with your puppy. Your puppy's temperament is determined by a combination of genetic and environmental influences. Once you have your puppy, there is nothing you can do to alter your pup's genetics. The only way you can influence your pup's approach to the world is through controlling and manipulating their environment. We call this socialization.

From the time your puppy is first able to understand that there is a world out there until your puppy is 3 months old, your puppy is in the critical developmental stage. During this time, your puppy is learning what is normal in the world. The greater the number of positive experiences your puppy has with different people, places, surfaces, visual stimuli, safe dogs, and other critters, the more comfortable your puppy will be in the world.

From the age of 3 months - 5 months, your pup's socialization window is closing. After the age of 5 months, you should do continuing "maintenance" socialization. Dogs who are not adequately socialized will be scared of new things, will not handle changes in their environments well, and depending upon the degree of the socialization deprivation they experienced, may never be entirely normal. Dogs which are improperly socialized, flooded and overwhelmed with new experiences learn quickly that the world is a scary place and they will be scared of new things, quickly overwhelmed, and prone to shutting down.

Pay attention to your pup's body language. Keep outings short, and fun, and enjoy the time with your puppy. By the time your puppy is 3 months old, your puppy should have:

- Received a treat, been patted by, and/or been held by at least 100 different people.
- Walked on at least 20 different surfaces.
- Should have heard hundreds of different noises
- Should have seen hundreds of different sights.
- Should have been to at least 20 different places.
- Should have met many, many dogs.
- Should have had positive encounters with any critters that you hope your puppy will be kind to later in life.
- Should be used to being touched, tugged, poked, prodded, and generally looked over.

If your puppy is older than 3 months old and you haven't begun socializing, start NOW.