

Do homework before buying dogs to avoid puppy mills

ORLANDO, Fla. — These reader questions were answered by experts attending the North American Veterinary Conference here Jan. 16-20 with more than 8,000 veterinary professionals from around the world.

Q: Our 11-year-old wants a dog. We've had golden retrievers before, and this time stopped at a pet store. What's your opinion about buying from the pet store? — B.J., cyberspace

A: Don't do it! Responsible breeders never, ever sell to a pet store. Responsible breeders want to know who is purchasing their pets, which would be impossible if they sold to pet stores.

Dr. Nancy Soares of Macungie, Pa., incoming president of the American Animal Hospital Association agrees. "In my experience, pet stores are middlemen between puppy mills and the end user."

Soares continues: "The care dogs at pet stores receive is variable, what goes on behind-the-scenes can be shocking. But even for dogs well cared for, were they well-socialized before being pulled away from their mothers? Do they have heritable disease, sometimes turning up later in life? And what kind of nutrition did they have? Do they have properly developed immune systems?"

And even if the puppy is perfectly healthy, and socialized, what about the mothers of these dogs?

"These poor dogs are breeding machines, living in terrible



STEVE DALE

veterinary care. They don't care about producing healthy pets. They care about producing. And by purchasing a dog from a pet store, you're supporting puppy mill profits," Soares says.

Another problem with dogs purchased at pet stores is they're often not accurate examples of the breed or mix they're sold as. So, consumers aren't purchasing what they think they are, which is fraud.

If you want a purebred dog, they're available from reputable breeders and rescues, as well as shelters.

Anyone can join the Facebook page Veterinary Professionals Against Puppy Mills: www.facebook.com/veterinaryprofessionalsagainstpuppymills.

Q: We really researched breeders — I think we did a good job. We found our miniature Schnauzer puppy, and brought him home in September. Unfortunately, Chief was ill from the moment he stepped foot in our home. The breeder gave him a haircut, and his entire body had sores that were infected. He also had worms. Then, it was discovered he had a hereditary liver shunt. He underwent surgery, and while

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under it was discovered he had a heart murmur. We lost him on Thanksgiving. The breeder did not offer a sincere response, though she said she'd return the cost of the dog — so far, that hasn't happened.

How does our family move forward and find a reputable breeder? Can you offer tips so this devastating heart-ache doesn't happen to other families? — K. M., Schaumburg, Ill.

A: "While this is tragic, it's not likely this dog ever received love until you came into the picture," says Dr. Mary Gardner, co-founder of Lap of Love, a nationwide network of veterinarians whose goal is to empower pet owners to care for their geriatric or sick pets, offering counseling and in-home euthanasia. "There are certainly reputable breeders, this was not one."

Reputable breeders provide a contract, which indicates the purchase price will be returned if a proven genetic problem occurs within a reasonable time frame after purchase. Of course, a responsible breeder wouldn't have sold an obviously ill dog in the first place.

Gardner, who is based in Los Angeles, says, "When choosing a breeder, or even a rescue, visit the place where the dog is at."

Does the dog's mother appear healthy and is her temperament typical for the breed you're thinking about buying, as the canine apple doesn't fall far from the tree. If he's around, meet dad dog, too. Is the facility clean? Does the breeder participate in dog shows? (That's a sign that the breeder cares about her line of dogs, and bettering the breed). If the breeder breeds multiple dog breeds, that's a red flag.

TAKE ME HOME



Ollie

Ollie is a 3-year-old miniature pinscher/Chihuahua mix. After enduring abuse, he needs to be around kind, gentle, loving people. He loves to sit in your lap. He enjoys other sweet dogs, so a home with a furry brother or sister would be best for him. Ollie is neutered, vaccinated and microchipped. To take Ollie home, contact Kiss 4 Homeless Animals by calling or texting Amy at 702-439-1942 or emailing kim@tixcorp.com.

And another red flag is breeding more than a few litters a year.

"Don't rely on the Internet," Gardner says. "The reality is that very bad breeders tell people what they want to hear. If the breeder doesn't allow a site visit — forget about it."

Gardner gives you huge props for hanging in when other dog owners might not have. "I understand it; these guys are so fast to dig little holes in our hearts," she says. "You have nothing to feel guilty about. You may feel better when you do get another pet, who will be one very lucky dog."

Q: My 5-year-old male ragdoll developed serious chronic drainage from his right eye about a year ago. After receiving an eye ointment, the situation hasn't changed. The veterinarian said the problem is caused by a chronic incurable virus. What do you know? — C.M., Hayward, Wis.

A: "The virus you're speaking about is the herpes virus," says Chicago feline veterinarian Dr. Colleen Currihan, president of the American Association of Feline Practitioners. "Herpes viruses will often come and go throughout a cat's life, and you are right, there's no magic cure, but you can treat the symptoms."

If this problem is a new one, perhaps there's another explanation. Currihan says that it's possible that your cat may have a blocked tear duct. If that turns out to be the issue, you may want to see a veterinary ophthalmologist.

— Steve Dale welcomes questions/comments from readers. Although he can't answer all of them individually, he'll answer those of general interest in his column. Send e-mail to petworld@steve.dale.tv. Include your name, city and state.