



QUESTIONS TO ASK A TOY POODLE BREEDER

*GUIDELINES FOR BUYING A TOY POODLE
(OR MANY OTHER BREEDS OF PUREBRED DOGS)*

Don't be the victim of an unethical breeder!

Don't buy from a pet shop or puppy mill!

The enclosed questionnaire was written to assist people who are planning to buy a purebred puppy and are looking for a conscientious, reputable breeder.

Prospective puppy buyers often do not know what questions to ask breeders and often do not know what answers to expect. Use this questionnaire as a tool to screen breeders and to make an educated decision about purchasing your new Toy Poodle.

We recommend you make as many copies of the questionnaire as you need. Make one for each breeder you contact. We have included a place for you to write their answers.

Breeders' answers should be direct and come easily without hesitation.

Many of the questions relate to genetically-transmitted diseases and anomalies. You should be given copies of all relevant health test reports before your purchase.

You can verify all Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) testing at this web site: <http://www.offa.org>. Just enter the registered names of the sire and dam of the litter to check the test results for luxating patella, hip dysplasia, OptiGen DNA, CERF, Legg-Calves-Perthes disease, and thyroid malfunction.

Some breeders do not record everything with OFA; so, if the results aren't listed, check the copies you are given very carefully to make sure the testing is legitimate.

For additional information to help you make the right choice in choosing a breeder, see the following Versatility in Poodles (VIP) educational materials:

- *Buying a Poodle*
- *How to Evaluate a Breeder*
- *How to Evaluate the Web Site of a Poodle Breeder*
- *VIP Recommended Genetic and Health Tests for Toy Poodles*

These materials may be found on the VIP web site: http://www.vipoodle.org/docs/VIP_education.html.

Remember

- Don't be afraid to ask questions. Good breeders encourage buyers to ask questions. If a breeder tries to discourage you from asking questions or gets defensive, politely end the conversation.
- If the breeder claims her dogs do not have health problems and, therefore, she does not have to test her dogs, politely end the conversation. How does she know if her dogs have problems if she doesn't test?
- If the breeder claims she does test her dogs, but she simply can't put her hands on the written test results in order to send you a copy, politely end the conversation. Most tests should be recorded online at <http://www.offa.org>.
- If the breeder says it's too expensive to test all her dogs, politely end the conversation.
- It should raise a red flag if the breeder says this was an "accidental breeding." Very rarely will a good breeder have an accidental breeding. Every breeding should be well thought out and done for a specific reason. The parents should still be tested, even if the testing is after the breeding occurs. Expect the breeder to be apologetic or embarrassed; if she is not, politely end the conversation.
- A conscientious breeder will ask **you** many questions. Responsible breeders are very concerned about the homes in which their puppies will live. Answer the questions honestly and thoroughly. You may also be asked to fill out an application or questionnaire which will help the breeder select the right puppy for your needs. Beware of the breeder whose only concern is whether or not you can pay the purchase price of the puppy and who does not seem to care about anything else. Most conscientious breeders do not have puppies available at all times. It is normal to be put on a waiting list.
- If the breeder advertises "teacup" or "tinies," be aware that these are marketing tools. Any Poodle 10 inches or less at the shoulder is a Toy Poodle. If they are even smaller, they are still Toy Poodles. Poodles are black, white, red, apricot, blue, café au lait, silver, silver-beige, or brown (not "chocolate," which is a marketing ploy). They may also be parti-colored, (not one solid color but spotted, or with several colors in a pattern such as a Doberman). **Don't be sold a Poodle by excellence in marketing. Look for excellence in breeding.**

BREEDER QUESTIONNAIRE — TOY POODLE

Breeder _____ Telephone _____

Email _____ Web Site _____

Address _____

Currently has puppies _____ Expects puppies on _____

Today's date _____ Other _____

Registered name of the sire of this litter _____

Registered name of the dam of this litter _____

Do the parents of the litter have any titles (are the parents champions or do they have performance titles in such areas as agility or obedience)?

What do the letters before and after their names mean?

Q. How long have you been involved in this breed?

Preferably, individuals should be involved in the breed several years before breeding a litter. They should have a thorough knowledge of genetics, animal husbandry, nutrition, the breed standard and animal behavior.

A.

Q. How many litters do you have each year? Why?

The American Kennel Club (AKC) considers anyone who breeds 7 or more litters a year to be a high-volume breeder subject to AKC inspections for record keeping and care and conditions. Raising a litter of puppies is a lot of work! Breeders who have puppies all the time, or who raise a lot of puppies, may not be properly raising and socializing each individual pup. Responsible breeders do not produce litters "for the money."

A.

Q. How old are the sire and dam of this litter?

It is strongly recommended in many breeds that no dog be bred before it is two years old. This is especially true of the larger breeds. Large dogs are slow to reach physical and mental maturity. Also, many orthopedic and genetic health problems may not surface until a dog is near, or over, two years of age. Breeders that care about the health of their dogs are not in a rush to breed them. Toy sires and dams occasionally are used the first time when under the age of two, but all health testing should still be done before this first breeding.

A.

Q. What health problems does this breed have?

If a breeder claims the breed has no inherited health problems, or that she isn't aware of any inherited health problems, politely end the conversation. All breeds have genetic health problems – some more than others. Every breeder should be knowledgeable about these problems and willing to share this information.

A.

Q. Do the sire and dam of this litter have Canine Health Information Center (CHIC) numbers assigned to them by OFA?

If a Poodle has had certain recommended health testing, OFA assigns a CHIC number and the health testing for that dog is open and available on the OFA web site at <http://www.offa.org>. This CHIC number shows that the breeder had the recommended testing done for this variety and is willing to make the results of that testing public. Designation with a CHIC number does **not** show that the dog actually passed the testing, only that the tests were administered. Look at the test results for yourself.

A.

Q. Have the parents' hips been x-rayed for evidence of hip dysplasia? Hip dysplasia does occur in smaller breeds. Are the hips certified normal by OFA or the University of Pennsylvania Hip Improvement Program (PennHIP)?

Hip dysplasia is a degenerative, often painful and crippling, hereditary disorder that can be treated in some cases by expensive surgery.

OFA evaluates x-rays and diagnoses whether a dog is dysplastic or has normal hips. OFA certifies normal hips as early as 24 months. PennHIP also uses radiographic technology and is accurate in puppies as young as 16 weeks of age. No Toy Poodle should be bred unless it has been x-rayed and its hips have been certified normal.

If the answer to this question is yes, ask for the ratings. OFA ratings of excellent, good or fair are all considered normal. PennHIP ratings are a percentage; they show the proportion of dogs with better and worse hips. If the answer is no, ask if the grandparents, siblings, or any other members of the “family” of

this puppy have ever been diagnosed with HD. If they have, and the parents are not certified, decline to buy this puppy. This is an optional test for Toy Poodles.

A.

Q. Have the parents been x-rayed for Legg-Calve-Perthes disease (LCP)? Are they certified unaffected by OFA?

LCP is a disorder of hip joint conformation occurring in both humans and dogs. In dogs, it is most often seen in the miniature and toy breeds between the ages of 4 months to a year. OFA evaluates x-rays and certifies whether a dog is clear of LCP for dogs over 12 months. Although the mode of inheritance is currently unknown, no dog affected by LCP should be bred.

If a dog's hips are certified as normal, OFA also considers the dog unaffected for LCP; therefore, it may not always be necessary to obtain LCP certification.

If the answer to this question is yes, ask for a copy of the testing. If the answer is no and there is no normal hip certification, ask if the grandparents, siblings, or any other members of the “family” of this puppy have ever been diagnosed with LCP. If they have, and the parents are not certified, decline to buy this puppy. This is an optional test for Toy Poodles.

A.

Q. Have the dam and sire had their stifles screened by a veterinarian for patellar luxation? Are they certified normal by OFA? Were the grandparents screened and certified?

Patellar luxation is often, but not always, a hereditary condition. The patella, or kneecap, is part of the stifle joint (knee). When the kneecap luxates, it slips or pops out of joint either to the inside or the outside of the knee. Surgery may be required to fix this problem. Patellar luxation may be evident as soon as the puppy begins walking. Other forms manifest as late as 8 years old and all forms vary in severity. Veterinarians can do an evaluation to diagnose patellar luxation. OFA certification can be done at 12 months.

If the answer to this question is yes, ask for a copy of the testing. If the answer is no, and the dog does not have a normal patella certification, decline to buy a puppy. Screening for patellar luxation is one of the tests required for **CHIC** certification in Toy Poodles.

A.

Q. Have the dam and sire had their eyes checked and certified to be free of eye diseases, some of which are presumed to be hereditary, within the past 12 months by a veterinary ophthalmologist? This eye exam is called the “CERF” exam (Canine Eye Registry Foundation).

Dogs must be examined annually for evidence of eye disorders. Poodles can be affected by cataracts, microphthalmia, micropapilla, optic nerve hypoplasia, glaucoma, and many other serious eye disorders,

some of which cause blindness. No dog affected with an eye disorder which is presumed to be inherited should be bred. There are disorders which are considered by CERF to be “breeder’s option.”

If the answer to this question is yes, ask to see the CERF certificate. If the answer is no, decline to buy a puppy. A CERF eye exam is one of the tests required for **CHIC** certification in Toy Poodles.

CERF results may also be found at the CERF web pages at <http://www.vmdb.org/verify.html>.

A.

Q. Have the dam and sire been DNA tested for progressive retinal atrophy (PRA)?

A puppy carrying two genes for PRA will be affected with the disease. Dogs with *prcd*-PRA often become blind, and always have serious vision problems. There is no cure for PRA, but this condition is easily avoidable with proper testing and breeding. At least one parent must be clear to guarantee your puppy does not have the *prcd* form of PRA.

DNA testing for *prcd*-PRA (the most common form) is available for Toy Poodles through OptiGen at: http://www.optigen.com/opt9_test_prcd_pra.html. A Poodle may also be deemed "clear by parentage" without needing to be tested itself.

OFA will deem a dog to be “clear by parentage” if the parents’ OptiGen DNA testing has been recorded as being clear. If the OptiGen DNA testing was not recorded, ask to see the OptiGen certificates and the registrations on the sire and dam, along with grandsires and granddames, and compare the names of the sire and dam with the OptiGen certificates very carefully to ascertain that all of the grandparents are clear for either the sire or dam of the puppies.

If the answer to this question is yes, ask to see the DNA test certificate or verify the “clear by parentage.” If the answer is no, decline to buy the puppy. OptiGen DNA testing is one of the tests required for **CHIC** certification in Toy Poodles.

A.

Q. Has there been any occurrence of seizures, epilepsy, diabetes, autoimmune diseases, Cushing's disease or Addison's disease in relatives of the sire or dam? Has either parent experienced any other major health problems?

At the time of this writing, there are genetic health problems for which there is no screening or DNA test available. Unless you ask the breeder if the sire and dam have had a seizure or other health issue, or if any of the other listed diseases have occurred in any relatives, they may not volunteer this information. These problems may be hereditary and seem to be more prevalent in some families of dogs.

A.

Q. Will you provide written copies of the results of all tests done on the sire and dam of this litter for hereditary health problems?

Written reports are provided to the breeder whenever she has a dog tested for a genetic health problem. Reputable breeders are always happy to provide copies to prospective puppy buyers.

A.

Q. Is all testing discussed above listed on the OFA web site?

If the answer to this question is yes, you will want to verify this for yourself. You can access a dog's record at the OFA web site, <http://www.offa.org>, by using the dog's registered name, registration number, or OFA number.

A.

Q. How do you socialize your puppies?

Puppies should begin to be socialized at the breeder's house and introduced to many people (including children), various surfaces, noises, and other environmental factors. You want to make sure the breeder has the time to give adequate attention to each puppy and to do everything she can do to prepare them to be well-adjusted members of the buyer's household.

A.

Q. At what age do you sell your puppies?

No puppy should be separated from its mother and littermates before it is seven weeks old. Puppies who are separated before that age may not have learned to interact properly with their littermates. They may become dog aggressive as they get older. The best age to purchase a Toy Poodle puppy is between 8 and 12 weeks old. Puppies are neurologically complete at 7 weeks and their personalities are set by 12 weeks. It is illegal in many areas to sell a puppy under the age of 8 weeks.

If the Toy Poodle is very small, it should be left with the dam and the breeder until it is large enough that the breeder and her veterinarian consider the puppy to be stable. Small toy dogs may have trouble maintaining body temperature, and they may have difficulty maintaining blood sugar. Hypoglycemia (low blood sugar) can be life threatening, and the added stress of moving the very small puppy to a new home can help trigger an attack. Symptoms may include listlessness, lack of coordination, or seizures, because the brain cannot burn fat or protein and relies entirely on sugar.

A.

Q. Will the puppies be checked by a veterinarian before they are sold?

All puppies should be vet checked before leaving the breeder. Only a veterinarian can detect things such as heart murmurs. At eight weeks of age, the veterinarian can do an early check for any patella problem

and can verify the toy puppy is stable enough to be separated from its mother. Many breeders provide a certificate from the veterinarian certifying the health of the puppy.

A.

Q. Which vaccinations will the puppy have when I purchase it?

Every puppy should have at least one vaccination before it leaves the breeder's home. The vaccine will include distemper and parvovirus, and may also include hepatitis, parainfluenza or adenovirus. The type of vaccine depends on the breed and the schedule the breeder or veterinarian chooses to follow.

A.

Q. Will the puppy be wormed before it is sold?

Many puppies have roundworms when they are born. Puppies may need to be wormed several times, which can begin as early as three weeks of age. The breeder should provide a schedule of the dates on which the pup was wormed, and the medication and dosage administered. If the breeder does not automatically worm her puppies, she should have a fecal examination done to establish they are free of worms. If the breeder has a positive fecal result, she should disclose the type of worms present and the course of treatment used. Although the pup may have been wormed several times before it is sold, it is always wise to take a fecal sample to your vet at the time of the pup's first checkup.

A.

Q. Will the puppy be groomed before it's sold? How many times and how often has the puppy been groomed?

All puppies should be bathed before they are sold. Their toenails should be trimmed and their ears cleaned. Poodle puppies should have their faces, feet, and tails clipped, as well. Poodles will be groomed regularly over the course of their lives. Breeders should recognize this and should accustom the puppies to being groomed regularly. Puppies who have been groomed on a regular basis accept this process with less stress.

A.

Q. What will I receive along with the puppy?

The breeder should provide American Kennel Club (AKC), United Kennel Club (UKC), or Canadian Kennel Club (CKC) registration paperwork. In the United States, only the AKC and the UKC are non-profit registries; in Canada it is the CKC. Many other registries will register any dog for a fee, but they offer no guarantee of parentage, nor do they provide titling events to test conformation or trainability of the dogs they register. In some cases, the breeder may withhold the registration paperwork until the buyer has fulfilled certain contractual agreements, such as having the puppy altered by a specified age; this is an acceptable practice.

In addition, the breeder should provide a 3-5 generation pedigree, a schedule of vaccinations and worming, diet information, enough food for several days, the written health guarantee/contract, written results of the sire and dam's testing for genetic health problems and the veterinarian's health certificate. Many breeders also provide a "puppy manual" which includes information on a variety of topics which may include housebreaking, training, nutrition, and recommended books. If they do not provide such a manual, you may obtain your own puppy manual from VIP. Check the education pages at http://www.vipoodle.org/docs/VIP_education.html.

A.

Q. What is the price of the puppy?

Prices may vary depending on quality, sex, color, and area of the country. There is usually an acceptable range within which breeders charge for puppies of each breed. A significant deviation from that range (either much higher or much lower) should send up a red flag to the buyer.

Do not look for "bargains" or "sale prices." A price that is much lower may mean the breeder is cutting corners somewhere in order to raise this litter. A price that is much higher than other reputable breeders are charging in the same area may mean this particular breeder has an inflated sense of value about her own dogs. Paying a much higher price than other breeders in the same area are charging does not necessarily mean the dog is better. You may, however, pay more if you are buying from a reputable breeder who does obtain titles on breeding stock and does the recommended testing since she has more money invested in her breeding stock.

Don't pay more for "rare colors" or "mismarks" (any non-solid color including phantoms, brindles and partis) or for "designer dogs." These terms are marketing tools.

A.

Q. Can I pick the puppy I want from the litter to be sure I get the temperament and type of dog I'm looking for in a companion?

The breeder should ask you many questions about your family and your lifestyle. The breeder will want to know what your expectations are for this puppy. Do you want a bigger dog? Are you looking for one that will bark when someone comes to the door? In most cases, the breeder will select a puppy that she feels will meet your needs. In every litter, there will be a variation of personalities. Some puppies will be more outgoing than others. Some will be quieter than their littermates. Every puppy needs a home, and it's up to the breeder to match each puppy with a prospective buyer.

Many books advise prospective buyers to select the puppy that immediately comes right up to them. That puppy may be the dominant puppy in a litter. Not every buyer will want, or should have, the most dominant puppy in a litter! The same rule applies to a quiet or shy puppy. That puppy does not belong in a family with four young children! Breeders study the litter from the time the litter is born. They know the personalities of each puppy, and they are the best people to make the decision about which puppy goes to which family.

However, if the puppy the breeder selects for you does not fulfill your expectations, be sure to let the breeder know right away that you are not satisfied and make arrangements to return the puppy.

Most toy breeders do not sell their dogs to people with small children because of the fragility of the dog. Be respectful of the breeder. Responsible breeders know it is their duty to place the puppy they have bred into the best home for that puppy.

A.

Q. Do you only sell pets on a spay/neuter contract?

The breeder that does sell on contract cares enough about the animal to assure it is not being used and abused as a puppy mill dog. It also shows that the breeder is concerned about pet overpopulation and maintaining the Toy Poodle as a quality breed.

A.

Q. Are you willing to help me with questions and concerns I may have about the puppy for its entire life?

Breeders do have a responsibility to the animal's welfare even after the puppy is sold. Responsible breeders want to make sure their dogs are always in good, safe, loving homes for the life of the dog. Responsible breeders will also be interested in knowing how the dog is doing throughout its lifetime. **Be prepared for a clause in the contract that says the breeder will want the puppy back if you cannot keep the puppy at any time during its life.**

A.

Additional Information to Request from the Breeder

Ask for at least three references from people who own puppies purchased from this breeder. Ask each about their dog's health and temperament. If the breeder cannot provide three references from puppy buyers, ask for a reference from her mentor or other person who can vouch for her.

Name, phone number, e-mail address:

1.

2.

3.

When visiting the puppies:

Ask to look at the whelping room and puppy areas. Note the total environment and record an answer to each of the following:

- Is everything clean?
- Do puppies have toys to play with?
- Do puppies have fresh water?
- Do puppies have room to exercise?
- Are puppies clean and groomed?

Note: Weeping, tear-stained eyes are not normal.

Look at as many relatives as possible. Seeing these relatives may be your only insight into your puppy's temperament and overall quality.

- Are they friendly?
- Are they apparently healthy?

Ask about the breeder's past dogs and how long they lived. Toy Poodles should live 12-15 years.

If you are buying a puppy from a breeder who is not in your area, you should arrange to go and get the puppy, or at least visit the breeder before the puppy is available. If this is not possible, get references (and check them) and ask for photographs.

After you get your puppy:

Take your puppy to your veterinarian within 48 hours. Your puppy should be examined thoroughly. If problems are found, return the puppy immediately to the breeder with the veterinarian's report. The

breeder should be willing to guarantee the puppy's health. Genetic testing is done to help breeders avoid passing on genetically-transmitted diseases and anomalies. There is no line of living creatures totally free of genetic problems, including humans, but the incidence of problems can be markedly decreased by careful and selective breeding. Take each of these points into consideration when choosing your next Toy Poodle.

Happy Poodle hunting!!

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<http://www.vipoodle.org/docs/aboutvip.html>.

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