

So you want to be a breeder - and you own the male.

Most articles I have reviewed that discuss the breeding of dogs and the challenges that are a part of it do so from the perspective of the owner of the female. We seem to forget that it takes two to tango and there is an owner of the male dog that is involved in the breeding process. All parties have a responsibility to ensure that healthy puppies with stable temperaments are born, that they go to good homes and do not end up in abusive homes or puppy mills and that the new owners are prepared and able to care for the puppy, both emotionally and financially.

The most important thing to consider in everything I have read is overpopulation - are you sure you want to bring more puppies into the world? The Humane Society of the US estimates 6 - 8 million dogs are surrendered to shelters annually and half are euthanized. In Canada the number is half a million with the same results. This does not include the numbers of dogs surrendered to and euthanized by veterinarians or the numbers that move from home to home. Clearly there are lots of dogs available in shelters and with rescue organizations - more than homes can be found for. Ask yourself - do you potentially want to contribute to this problem?

The second factor is temperament - are you sure that you know your dog's temperament well enough to know he is a good breeding candidate. Does your male dog have a stable temperament? Is he able to cope with unusual situations, stress, being alone and being in highly stimulating environments without 'losing it'? Or, is your dog already a bit snarky with other dogs around or fearful or easily aroused - you add his temperament to a female's and you may create puppies that I have to see in behavioural assessments.

Another factor is how well do you know the owner of the female? Is this a person who will take responsibility for finding good homes for the puppies or is your male providing the breeding service for puppies that will be part of a puppy mill? Puppy mills are not just the horrors we hear about in the media. A puppy mill by definition is a situation in which little care is taken to ensure the well-being of the puppies. Well-being means the puppies are raised in an environment by knowledgeable people who ensure good socialization to humans and other dogs (essential by eight weeks of age) and who seek out responsible caring potential owners. Is the female's owner doing this for your dog's pups? What if the puppies get sold on-line with no screening and go to homes where they are mistreated? It happens every day.

Neutering is the only proven way to control overpopulation. There are lots of advantages to neutering as well - it is, in the long run, healthier. Unneutered male dogs are way more likely to have cancer of the prostate than neutered ones. Neutering goes a long way to getting rid of problem behaviours - marking, being king of the beach with other males and being randy and pulling toward every female dog he smells. Unfortunately those behaviours, while stimulated by hormones, become learned as well - and if you wait too long - even neutering may not help.

There are huge risks associated with the act of breeding itself. It doesn't always just happily work out - I know many breeders, having shown dogs for almost 20 years, and I know from them the problems when the dogs do not take - the number of times the males have to be manually stimulated because they are young and do not know what to do - the problems of the female taking exception to being mounted and attacking the male - the problems of tearing because the

two lock and then the male tries to get free - it goes on and on - clearly it works most of the time because we have millions of unwanted puppies - but you have to be prepared for it not working.

Another aspect is do you really know your dog is healthy - in what condition are his hips, elbows and shoulders - your male might have a mild hip dysplasia that doesn't cause him any problems but when it gets matched to a female with the same problem you get puppies with real problems - that may have to be euthanized as puppies.

What about possible genetic illnesses? There are lots being diagnosed now - good breeding is a complex process that requires knowledge of genetics - without considering these things it is just irresponsible breeding - and given the number of dogs in shelters - just in our small community - don't we have enough concerns already?

This is a big issue for me as a trainer because I work as a behavioural consultant as well as teaching basic classes and I see so many behavioural issues that are related to poor breeding and poor socialization. We are the humans - our dogs do not breed without our involvement - either we do not spay and neuter and let them run loose or we create the environment for breeding. Either way - we are responsible - not the dogs. And we are the ones that have the knowledge and humanity to change the numbers I quoted above. Do your part. Don't count on everyone else to be responsible. Neuter your male dog.