

Considerations Before you Breed

Everyone thinks it would be great to have litter of puppies (or kittens.) This is especially true if your pet has a great temperament and other favorable attributes. Also, many people want to recoup some of their cost for their pet by selling their own litter. But, there are many things that you should consider before you go down that road:

For starters, look at the reasons that veterinarians recommend spaying or castrating your pet at 5-6 months of age. You can reduce the chance of your female dog of getting breast cancer by 200%. There is also a decreased chance of getting breast cancer if you spay up to the age of 2 years, but none after that. Also, the intact female can go through false pregnancies where they will nest and produce milk, can get vaginal hyperplasia, uterine infections (pyometra), and cancer of the ovaries or uterus. The male dog also is benefited by surgery. Testosterone increases their chance of getting prostatic hyperplasia, testicular cancer and perianal tumors. Also, these diseases and cancers show up later in your pet's life, requiring surgery then when your pet is not as healthy and it is harder on them.

Next consider any abnormalities that your pet has. Did your male dog only have one descended testicle? Did your pet have any hernias when it was born? Does your pet have a heart murmur or seizures? Definitely pets with hip problems and other skeletal problems should not be bred. Not only can these traits be passed down, but it also will keep a bitch from being able to carry puppies easily during the pregnancy, and could be potentially life-threatening. Many breeds have standards which need to be followed before you can breed your pet. For example, Golden Retrievers should have their eyes certified by an ophthalmologist, hips certified by OFA, and many have echocardiograms done as well.

If you still want to breed your pet, you need to make sure that it is healthy and ready for breeding. Brucellosis is a sexually transmitted disease that can cause abortion and other reproductive problems. A titer can be sent to the lab to make sure that both the bitch and stud do not carry it before breeding. This test takes 3-4 days for results. OFA radiographs need to be done after your pet is 24 months old. It requires sedation by a veterinarian and radiographs to be taken. Hips and elbows can be done. You will need to allow at least 4 weeks for results. Your pet should be current on vaccinations to ensure immunity for the puppies, and especially negative for intestinal parasites. Males that are to be bred should have a semen sample evaluated for any problems that need to be addressed. Females also should have a vaginal smear evaluated to make sure that she does not have an infection, and sometimes we even do vaginal cultures. Eye certification and echos need to be done by specialists.

Lastly, you need to consider what you are getting yourself into. Once the female is bred, she will require a special diet and attention. There is always the possibility of complications with pregnancy- spontaneous abortion, dystocia (puppies get stuck), eclampsia, dead puppies, puppies born with deadly defects (cleft palate, hydrocephalus) requiring euthanasia, and death of the mother. The mom may not develop milk or may not want to nurse, requiring you to bottle feed pups for 4-6 weeks. Also, it is common for them to develop mastitis, sometimes severe that requires surgery. Then, mom can develop an uterine infection after delivery. There is also the fading puppy/kitten syndrome where they are poor-doers and can die over the first week or two. Of course, all of these scenarios are not often, but you must be prepared for any possibility.

If you do have a litter of puppies, the mother is going to require some area to whelp (whelping box).

The puppies need areas to move around and explore for the 7-8 weeks you will have them until you find homes for them. Also the puppies will require dewormer medication and their first vaccines to ensure that they will be healthy for their new owners. These are expenses you need to consider as well, as well as dewclaw removal and tail docking fees, if necessary.

Note: If you make sure that you are a responsible pet owner and breeder, there will be a commitment required of you of time and money. Most breeders will tell you that it is not a money making venture. If that is your main motivation- please reconsider.