

RSPCA 

for all creatures **great & small**

THE SMART PUPPY AND DOG BUYER'S GUIDE

Helping you make the right decisions
for you & your new best friend



If you're looking for a new canine companion, follow our **Smart Puppy and Dog Buyer's Guide** and you'll be on the right track to bringing home a happy and healthy puppy or dog. You'll also be helping to prevent the sale of puppies from puppy farms or irresponsible breeders.

You can also check out the [RSPCA online advertising guidelines](#) which were developed in response to strong interest and demand from the community, and to help online retailers develop good policies that protect animals and improve consumer trust.



Step 1

Check your local RSPCA or other reputable animal welfare or rescue groups first.

At any time, the RSPCA has many different types and breeds of puppies and dogs with a large variety of personalities and appearances. Regularly check with your local RSPCA and our adoption website www.adoptapet.com.au to see if your ideal canine friend has arrived at your local RSPCA centre. RSPCA dogs and puppies are checked to ensure they are suitable for adoption and are vaccinated, desexed, and microchipped. Adopting a RSPCA dog or puppy also means you are helping the RSPCA to take care of even more animals in need.

You can also contact and visit other reputable animal welfare or rescue organisations in your area to look for your new dog or puppy. If you are unable to find a dog from an animal welfare organisation, another option is to adopt a dog who is being rehomed privately. Adopting directly from the previous owner gives you the opportunity to ask lots of questions and do your due diligence (e.g., by visiting the place where the animal has been kept).

If you can't find the right puppy or dog to adopt straight away, keep looking - the right one for you might be available soon.

If you have your heart set on a specific breed or type of dog, remember that reputable animal welfare or rescue organisations may have puppies and dogs of specific breeds/types. There are sometimes even rescue organisations for specific breeds.

But if over time you still can't find the right pet for you, another option is to find a responsible breeder.

It is a good idea to see your veterinarian for a pre-purchase consultation to discuss the breed or type of dog you are considering. Your veterinarian can give you expert information about important considerations such as any special needs and known health or welfare issues associated with the breed (and what the potential management and treatment options might be for these, and costs involved). This could assist your decision making and help you be prepared.

Step 2

If you can't find the right puppy or dog to adopt, follow our Smart Puppy and Dog Buyer's Guide to help find a responsible breeder

For happy and healthy puppies (and satisfied owners!), it's best to look for breeders who:

- Plan ahead and aim to find good homes for every puppy they breed.
- Provide a high standard of care and living conditions for all their dogs.
- Are genuinely concerned about the welfare of their dogs.
- Are open to questions and provide a complete history of the puppy.
- Make sure that you will suit the puppy and the puppy will suit you.
- Breed to produce happy, healthy dogs, free from known inherited disorders.
- Provide ongoing support and information to new owners.
- Provide a guarantee to take back the animal within a specified time period after sale. They should also offer to accept animals returned as a result of problems arising from an inherited disorder at any time after sale.
- Provide references on request.
- Meet all their legal requirements.



Asking these important questions will help you to find a responsible breeder:

1. Did the breeder plan ahead for this litter?

A responsible dog breeder plans each litter and knows that they can find compatible and responsible homes for the puppies before they start breeding.

- Ask the breeder if this litter was planned, and what they will do with any unsold puppies. A responsible breeder will keep their puppies until the right home can be found or provide them with a lifelong home if an alternative home cannot be found.
- The breeding program should be based on veterinary advice, so ask which veterinary clinic the breeder uses.

2. Are you impressed with the puppies' and dogs' wellbeing, living conditions, and the standard of the care they are receiving?

To ensure that you can check the conditions in which your potential puppy has been raised, it's really important that you visit the puppies in the place where they were born and raised, and meet the their mother (and father and litter-mates too, if possible). This will also help you to avoid supporting irresponsible breeders and puppy farms which cause suffering to dogs and puppies.

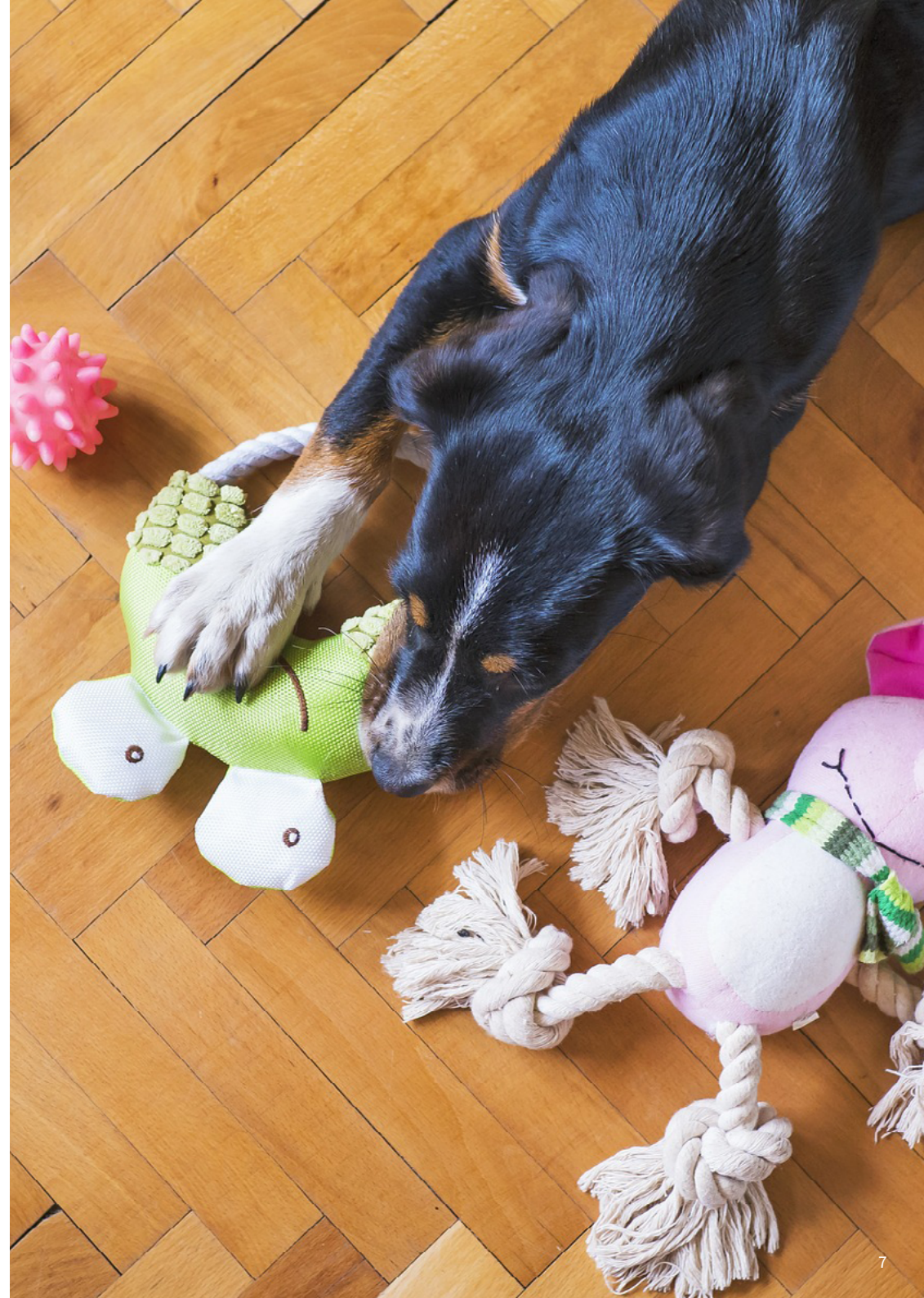
- Do all the puppies and adult dogs seem happy and healthy and in good body condition? Just looking is not enough as dogs can be under or overweight weight under all their hair (especially fluffy dogs). So, with a light touch and flat hands feel all over the dog's body to help assess their body condition score. To help you understand what is an ideal shape for your dog, Royal Canin has a great online tool that allows you to identify your dog's [Body Condition Score](#) with just a few questions. Remember the perfect score is 5.
- Are the puppies and adult dogs free from injury and moving freely and easily? Are their eyes, nose, and ears clear, without discharge? They should not be sneezing. Do they have well-groomed, shiny coats? There should be no fleas or patches of fur loss.

- Is the puppy eight weeks of age or will they be when you would be allowed to take them home? Puppies should not be removed from their mother for adoption or purchase before eight weeks of age and must be fully weaned.
- Watch how the puppies and adult dogs behave - are they friendly and calm around people, and other dogs? Do they approach you and allow you to stroke them, or are they fearful?
- The critical period for puppy socialisation is generally between approximately 2.5 to 14 weeks of age. This is when the puppy gets used to and learns to cope with sounds, sights, smells, and touch, and learns how to interact with other dogs, animals, and people. The puppy's experiences during this critical period of learning and development can influence and shape their behaviour for their whole life. A responsible breeder will make sure their puppies are bred for a temperament suited to living happily with people and are well socialised (aiming for multiple sessions of gentle and positive interactions with people every day and gradual and positive introduction to experiences, sounds, sights, smells, and touch that the puppies are likely to encounter in their life).
- Veterinary care:
 - Have the puppies had a full veterinary health check?
 - Are they microchipped, vaccinated, and treated for worms and fleas?
 - Are there documents from a veterinarian to confirm this?
 - A responsible breeder will provide information on desexing, vaccination, identification, and registration requirements.
- When visiting the puppy, ask to see where they have been kept. Although you may be introduced to the puppy in a house, they may not usually be kept there. Are there food bowls, bedding, toys, etc. that would indicate that this is where the puppy is normally kept?
- Is the place where the puppies and adult dogs are kept clean and free from unpleasant odours?

- ❑ Is there enough space for the puppies and adult dogs to move around, play, and exercise? There should be things for the puppies to safely chew on and play with, and enough space for them and their mother to move around and be active.
- ❑ Do the puppies and adult dogs have access to clean fresh water and fresh uncontaminated food? What are the puppies and adult dogs being fed and how often? A responsible breeder will provide information on how to feed your puppy.

If the breeder is reluctant for you to visit or wants you to meet the puppy in a place other than where they normally keep the puppies and adult dogs, this raises big red flags. Puppy farms and irresponsible breeders may use a house as a ‘shopfront’ so you don’t get to see the poor conditions the dogs are bred and kept in. They may want to meet you or sell you the puppy from somewhere other than the property where the animal is kept (or arrange “delivery”), and this should raise concern.

You should avoid buying a puppy without being able to visit their home, as you can’t check out the conditions in which the puppy was bred or know where they came from.



Desexing

Desexing (or sterilisation) prevents the birth of unwanted puppies. It may also reduce the risk of certain illnesses and diseases (e.g., mammary tumours) and reduce some undesirable behaviours such as mounting and roaming.

You should discuss the prevention of unwanted/unplanned breeding with your veterinarian and the best timing and approach (options could include surgical desexing or other safe suitable methods, such as appropriate gonad-sparing surgical or non-surgical sterilisation). There is no benefit in letting female dogs have a litter before they are desexed.

Being a responsible dog owner includes taking important actions like microchipping and vaccinating your dog. Sterilisation should be considered as just part of a more comprehensive list of actions you should discuss with your veterinarian who can advise you about how to best care for your dog and help keep your new best friend happy and healthy.

3. Is the breeder genuinely concerned about the welfare of their dogs?

Responsible breeders want the best for all their animals, from new puppies to retired breeding dogs. They take steps to ensure this by providing detailed advice about the puppy's background and care requirements, and don't have old breeding dogs euthanased because they're no longer productive.

- Ask about how old the mother is and how old she was when she had her first litter and was she bred on her first season.
- Ask how many litters the mother has already had and how frequently she has had a litter.
- The mother should have reached full adult physical development prior to breeding and should not have been bred on her first heat. Speak to your veterinarian about the minimum and maximum acceptable age for breeding and maximum number of litters for the type and breed of dog you are considering. There may also be legal requirements that dog breeders in your state or territory must meet (e.g., the minimum and maximum age at which a dog may be bred). You can find more information [here](#). Prior to breeding, dogs should be checked by a veterinarian and confirmed to be in good health and fit to breed.
- Ask the breeder what happens to their retired breeding animals – are they kept by the breeder or rehomed? Retired breeding dogs can be great companion animals.
- Puppies and adult dogs should have opportunities for positive human-animal interactions, they should display natural and varied activity patterns, be comfortable and confident in their surroundings, positively respond to human interactions, and they should have choice over what and when and not show signs of fear or stress.
- Responsible breeders want to make sure you are well-informed about your new puppy and will provide information on the background, size, breed, and temperament of the parents, as well as any relevant medical history, including inherited diseases or predispositions. You should also be provided with information on diet, socialisation, registration and identification requirements, and any medications or vaccinations given or required in the future.
- The breeder should be willing to answer questions and allow inspection of records and paperwork that are relevant to the puppy such as registration documents and veterinary records. The breeder should disclose if the puppy has been treated by a veterinarian for any reason prior to the sale. A refusal to answer reasonable questions should raise red flags.

4. Does the breeder make sure that you and the puppy will suit each other?

A new puppy is a long-term commitment, so both you and the breeder need to be certain you are making the right decision.

It is really important to interact with the puppy before making the decision to bring them home.

A well-socialised puppy should enjoy interacting with humans, and not be fearful, growl, or bite. Each individual dog varies in how sociable they'll want to be with humans, but in general, a puppy who is going to be a companion dog should be comfortable being handled appropriately by people.

Ask the breeder questions about the puppy's experiences with people and with adult dogs and other animals, and other experiences (e.g., if they are used to the noise and movement of a vacuum cleaner, washing machine, radio, TV, car etc.).

A responsible breeder will ask you questions to make sure you are a suitable match for this puppy and that you're able to care for the puppy well and provide for their physical and mental needs.

For example, they might ask:

- Do you have other animals? What animals are these and how sociable are they?
- If you have children, and if so, talk to you about whether the breed/type of puppy is suitable for families with children.
- How long and often will the puppy be left on their own?
- What type of space will the puppy have access to? i.e., indoors, outdoors, both indoors and a secure outdoor area such as a garden, patio, courtyard? They will talk to you about what space and exercise is needed for the breed/type of puppy.

- What you will do to provide the puppy with a home that meets their physical and mental needs. For example, what toys, housing, and stimulation will you provide?
- Are you aware of the breed/type specific care requirements? For example, if the puppy has a flat or brachycephalic face, you will need to take extra care with exercise, hot weather, and air travel due to the breathing difficulties and heat intolerance that may be associated with the puppy's exaggerated features. Are you aware of the amount of grooming that will be required, particularly for long or thick coated breeds/types?

If you're at all uncomfortable with what you are told, you might want to consider another breeder or type of dog. Your local RSPCA and veterinarian can provide advice.

DID YOU KNOW?

A puppy farm (also known as a puppy factory or puppy mill) is an intensive dog breeding facility that is operated under inadequate conditions that fail to meet the dogs' physical and mental needs. Puppy farms are usually large-scale commercial operations, but inadequate conditions may also exist in small-volume breeding establishments which may or may not be run for profit.

5. Is your puppy bred to be a companion dog and healthy and free from disease?

Talk to a veterinarian about the breed you are thinking of getting and look at reputable resources to make sure that the breed is right for you and you know what to expect.

Infectious diseases

- All puppies and adult dogs should have had their core vaccinations to protect against canine distemper virus, canine adenovirus, and canine parvovirus.
- There are non-core vaccinations available for other pathogens such as canine parainfluenza virus, *Bordetella bronchiseptica* (these pathogens both contribute to kennel cough), and leptospirosis. Ask the breeder what vaccinations their veterinarian has recommended for their dogs and ask your own veterinarian what vaccines your puppy needs.

For more information about vaccinating dogs, visit the [RSPCA Knowledgebase](#).

- The puppies and adult dogs should be free of fungal disease and parasitic infections (e.g., ringworm, ear mites, fleas, worms).

Inherited diseases and exaggerated features

Different breeds can be predisposed to different inherited disorders or diseases. Some of these aren't apparent until later in a dog's life but can have devastating consequences. Some breeds have exaggerated features that can cause problems, like a flat or brachycephalic face, which makes it hard for them to breathe and intolerant of hot weather, or very long backs, which can be associated with spinal problems.

A responsible breeder will be aware of, and screen for, any known disorders or anatomical problems specific to the breed and will exclude dogs with problems from breeding. They will be able to show you copies of veterinary reports and screening tests to confirm this. They should also avoid breeding for exaggerated physical features that compromise dog welfare.

- Find out what inherited diseases and other health and welfare issues may occur in the breed you are considering and ask the breeder:
 - Has the mother or father had any surgical procedures to correct features that could be inherited by the puppy?
 - Was this puppy born by caesarean section?
 - What steps has the breeder taken to screen for and prevent inherited diseases and welfare problems associated with exaggerated features?
- It is a good idea to talk to a veterinarian about the breed you are considering. You can look at reputable resources to find out more about the breed and help you make a decision about whether the breed is right for you and so you know what to expect and can be prepared.
- Check whether there is any legislation or codes of practice relating to inherited diseases that apply in your location and, if so, ask what the breeder does to comply.
- One proven way to minimise the risk of inherited problems is to avoid breeding closely related animals. If you are buying a purebred dog, you should check the puppy's pedigree to make sure there are no close relative matings, such as brother-sister or grandfather-granddaughter matings.
- Ask the breeder what they think are the most important characteristics in their puppies. A responsible breeder will put health, welfare, and temperament above appearance.

DID YOU KNOW?

Pedigree or purebred dog breeders are often referred to as 'registered breeders' when they are members of a breed club or association that operates a stud book or register. The term may also be used to refer to someone who is registered with their local council as a breeder (also called a 'recognised' breeder).

While breed associations generally have rules and guidelines for their members, being 'registered' does not necessarily mean a breeder is responsible or meets good animal welfare standards.

To find a responsible breeder it's important to visit the place where they breed and keep their animals and ask the right questions before you buy. This guide was written to help you know what to look for and what questions to ask.

6. Does the breeder offer to provide ongoing support and information after purchase?

- A responsible breeder will provide full contact details and encourage you to get in touch if you need more information on the care of your new puppy.

7. Does the breeder provide a guarantee?

- What if you take the puppy home and he/she has a health problem, or doesn't get on with your family (e.g., children, adults, and other companion animals) and it turns out to not be the right fit? A responsible breeder will offer to take back an unwanted animal within a specified time period after sale. They should also offer to accept animals returned as a result of problems arising from an inherited disorder at any time after sale.

8. Does the breeder provide references to back up what they have told you?

- You've asked a lot of questions, but you'd like to be sure that the breeder is genuine. A responsible breeder will readily provide references on request, including testimonials from previous or existing owners of their puppies, documentation and testimonial from their veterinarian, and documents indicating membership of a breed association or companion animal club where relevant.

9. Is the breeder meeting all legal requirements?

- Requirements for dog breeders vary across jurisdictions, but it's a good idea to call the local council in the breeder's area and ask whether breeders have to be registered with them and if there is a code of practice or guidelines that they should be following. If the answer is yes, you can ask the breeder for their registration details and what guidelines they follow.

Follow our **Smart Puppy and Dog Buyer's Guide** and you'll be on the right track to bringing home a healthy and happy puppy or dog.

Before you take your puppy or dog home, check out the [RSPCA Knowledgebase](#) for information on reward-based training and general care.

Useful links:

RSPCA Adoptapet adoptapet.com.au

RSPCA Australia rspca.org.au

RSPCA Knowledgebase kb.rspca.org.au

RSPCA Pet Insurance rspcapetinsurance.org.au





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**PO Box 265
Deakin West ACT 2600**

02 6282 8300

rspca@rspca.org.au

rspca.org.au