



How to Achieve the Perfect Pet Adoption

The days of shopping for that puppy in the pet store window are fading quickly as we look through our computer windows for our next pet family member instead. How do you find a reputable purveyor of puppies without supporting the puppy mill business?

It is not easy because there are so many ways to be tricked into purchasing a puppy mill puppy. A local kennel that is an easy driving distance from the North Shore fooled me. They advertised in the back of a major Boston newspaper. They told me they had two chocolate labs left from a litter. When I got there with my kids they had one lab left, which of course we fell in love with at first sight. When I diagnosed our puppy Milo with the contagious but curable intestinal parasite Giardia and called the kennel to alert them I was surprised and somewhat suspicious when they expressed an amazing lack of interest in this finding. This is a parasite that is contagious to people and can cause intense abdominal pain for months in humans. A responsible shelter or breeder would be continually checking to make sure their puppies did not carry this parasite. Milo was certainly not a perfect specimen. He had a white spot on his chest and was far from the breed standard for a Chocolate Labrador dog. Of course we kept Milo and loved him for many years until his big heart gave out in 2009.

Over the past years I have seen several very ill puppies come from this very kennel. What clinched it for me was an article in the Boston Globe about a truck that was pulled over with puppies in deplorable conditions being shipped to this very kennel. So if a veterinarian can be fooled, you certainly could be too. Unfortunately the fines for abusing animals in this way are so minimal and the money to be made is large enough that the crime continues. These organizations pay their fines and continue with their "business".

Shopping online does not guarantee you will avoid puppy mill puppies. Many great organizations work through petfinder.com to help bring millions of animals out of neglect and into safe homes. However there is also a large online presence of puppy mill breeders selling purebreds. My sister and brother in law ordered up two Wheaten Terriers online before consulting with me (how could they?!). Were they from puppy a puppy mill? Quite possibly they were. The Internet can serve as a cover for the poor conditions and abuse of the breeder dogs. They may show you pictures of the "parents" that are just photos of better examples of the breed than the actual parents. Each breed may be sold by a different online "kennel" with a unique name and website but they may be coming from the same huge puppy mill.

The occasional puppy mill will masquerade as a pet rescue organization to fool buyers. Two women in a rented truck towing a van were pulled over by police in Tennessee. Dogs were in both the van and the truck overcrowded, sitting in their own mess with no

water or food. The women were transporting dogs from their rescue organization Hearts for Hounds from California to Virginia.

As veterinarians, we are concerned about the health and welfare of the animals. Breeding dogs too often is not a healthy practice and many pets suffer from the poor sanitation and crowded living conditions. Shockingly, many of these breeders opt to perform medical procedures (such as ear crops, tail docks, vaccinations etc.) without utilizing a veterinarian. This can lead to mutilation, infections and even death among their breeding stock.

Your best source of information before purchasing or adopting is your veterinarian. Your veterinarian will be able to advise you on breeds and temperaments that would be suitable for your family and lifestyle. If you don't have a veterinarian currently then find one and set up a consult to discuss your upcoming adoption. The safest place to search for your pet may be at the local shelter. Purebred dogs and cats are there waiting for you as well as all kinds of great mixed breed pets. There are shelters for birds as well.

If you are at a breeder's location ask to see the mother of the litter you are viewing. Often resellers buy entire litters from puppy mills and then pose as a breeder. The seller may be situated in a pastoral part of New England in a very nice setting, but if the mother is not available to be viewed there is a good chance the pups are from puppy mills. I also would never recommend that a client purchase a pet at a pet store. If you are at a pet store be aware that an AKC registration does not guarantee the pet was from a reputable breeder. AKC registrations are not that hard to come by. Please resist the urge to make that impulse purchase and do the legwork to find a dog that is not feeding money into animal abusive businesses.

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