



# How to Pick a Breeder

## *The Search Begins!*

Adding a new puppy to your home can be exciting, but trying to find a good breeder can be a quagmire. With a Tibetan Mastiff, a puppy is a 12-14+ year commitment that will alter your life in ways you may never have thought possible. This is a challenging breed, even for those who have experience with other large dogs or guardian breeds. Finding the right breeder is essential to finding the right puppy for your family and your lifestyle. Here are some things to look for in a breeder to help you get started.

### ***Knowledge and Experience with Tibetan Mastiffs***

First and foremost, a breeder needs to know the breed. How long a person has been breeding is not always a good indication of whether the person is a reputable breeder or not; someone who has been a bad breeder for 40 years is still a bad breeder! On the flip side, if someone buys 2 dogs and immediately starts producing puppies without taking the time to know and understand the breed, it is a pretty good indicator they are trying to breed for profit (\$\$\$), not for the betterment of the breed. A good breeder will have lived with the breed for a number of years, and understand all stages of life, from puppy to senior, will have worked with a respected mentor in the breed, and will be active in a breed club or organization that promotes and supports preservation of the breed, such as ATMA or a similar national breed organization. He/she will also keep current on the latest developments in food science and veterinary care and can guide you in choosing a food and vaccine schedule that will best benefit your TM, recommend appropriate levels of exercise, give recommendations on when to spay/neuter, and in general be a knowledgeable sounding board for other breed specific health and wellness matters.

### ***Health Testing.***

Health testing means having all dogs that are bred tested for inheritable health conditions that may be passed on to the puppies. It is not possible to test for all possible diseases, but when there are health issues that are common in a particular breed, it is prudent to check for those before breeding. The argument against health testing by those who don't want to spend the money is usually that health testing does not guarantee that your puppy won't have an issue. That is true, there is no way to predict Mother Nature, but starting with parents that are clear of known diseases and health conditions **greatly** increases the odds that the puppies will also be clear. Recommendations vary by breed: The AKC, OFA, and ATMA recommend testing for hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, thyroid disorders, and inherited eye diseases in TMs, because these are the most common genetic issues we see in our breed. However, be aware that only the tests for hip and elbow dysplasia do not need to be repeated when done after 2 years of age. Thyroid function and eye health can change over time, so these tests should be repeated, and results current. A thyroid test at one year old is almost always normal, and does not address whether the dog has gone low thyroid at 3 or 4 years of age. The same is true of eye conditions such as cataracts or a degenerative disease such as PRA, and this is a key reason to wait until the dog is past 2 years of age before breeding. Finally, ask to see the results of the tests. Verify not only that they have been done, but that they were done for the actual dogs in question (verified ID), and that the dogs passed. We had a breeder last

year who was telling puppy buyers that her dogs were health tested, which they were, but she failed to mention that they failed their OFAs.

[Orthopedic Foundation for Animals](#)  
[Recommendations for Tibetan Mastiff](#)

### ***Selective Breeding Practices.***

A good breeder will breed only healthy, stable tempered dogs that are of prime breeding age. While a male can breed throughout his life time, with TM females, this is considered between 2 and 7 years of age. Our breed ethics guidelines suggest no more than 2 litters in 3 years. In addition, a responsible breeder will not breed more litters than he/she has time to adequately care for and socialize; this usually translates to no more than one or two litters per year, especially since most TM litters are born at roughly the same time. Selective breeding also means limiting the number of breeds that any one person breeds. No breeder can be an “expert” in all the breeds, so multiple breeds with little or no expertise is a red flag, as is any breeder who cross-breeds designer dogs. Ask about the age of the parents, how many litters the female has produced, and what other breeds are being bred.

### ***Prepares Puppies for Their New Home***

Puppies that remain with their mom and littermates until a minimum of 10-12 weeks of age tend to be more confident and better adjusted and later exhibit fewer problem behaviors such as fears, phobias, and dog aggression than those taken away younger. TMs are slow to mature, and that extra few weeks helps the puppy to learn manners and pack social skills that are invaluable. It also gives the breeder time to prepare the pups to leave the nest. A good breeder will begin potty training and kennel training, introduce the pup to new experiences (such as car rides) and new people, and in general prepare the pups for their new owners.

### ***A Written Contract***

A reputable breeder will offer you a written contract that spells out financial obligations, care expectations, and protects both buyer and seller. It should not be so restrictive that it is impossible to adhere to. While recommendations should be made, a breeder who includes clauses to control every aspect of your puppies life, from food, to vaccines, to exercise, or the contract will be voided, is a breeder that is looking for a loophole. Ask for a copy of the contract ahead of time and **READ THE CONTRACT**. Sometimes puppy buyers get so excited and so anxious to get their puppy at pick-up time that they sign without thinking. Check to see whether the breeder stands behind their puppies with a reasonable health guarantee and will be there to take the puppy back in the event that you are unable to care for your puppy for any reason. We all like to think that it would never happen to us, but it does happen....every day. A good breeder will always take their pup back or assist with rehoming so you are assured that your pup will never be without a home.

### ***Shows and Titles Their Dogs***

This is the most controversial tip you will find here. Many people just don't understand what this has to do with being a good breeder or how it impacts their puppy. Let me explain. A dog show is not a beauty contest. The purpose of a dog show is to evaluate breeding stock; to have an independent person (judge) look at a dog and determine whether this dog meets the acceptable Breed Standard and is a good example of the breed. Every breeder thinks his/her dogs are great, but “kennel blindness” is real, and while they may be great dogs, they may

not necessarily be great Tibetan Mastiffs. A judge looks at type (whether the dog looks like a Tibetan Mastiff); conformation (structure, how the dog is built); movement; and to some degree, temperament. Type is essential to preservation of the breed. The introduction of the Chinese dogs and their exaggerated type is an example of how we lose a breed that we love. A dog's structure and movement can indicate possible future health issues, such as hip dysplasia or ligament injuries due to over- or under-angulation, an underbite or overbite, or a weak topline that will result in a sway back and disc problems down the road. If a dog will not stand for the judge's examination, or is aggressive towards other dogs in the ring, it can signal temperament issues. From a breeder standpoint, it indicates an individual who is willing to make the commitment and spend the time and money to insure that they are breeding true to Standard with the goal of breed preservation in mind.

### ***Visits Welcomed***

Definitely go to visit the breeder before you buy a puppy if at all possible. Temperament is critical in this breed and you can't tell that from a picture or even a video. Once properly introduced, you should be able to come into the home or yard and interact with the breeder and his/her dogs without fear. In addition, many breeders are masters of "trick photography" or even photo-shopping the pictures of their dogs to make them look bigger than they are, and many exaggerate the size and weight of their dogs. You need to see what you are actually buying. In addition, where and how the pups are raised will affect your puppy for a lifetime. Look for a breeder that raises the pups in the home, where they are surrounded with people and household sounds and handled daily. Pups and their environment should be clean and free of smells, and there should be toys and play areas so that the puppies can run, play, and be adequately stimulated for proper mental and psychological development. Early canine neurostimulation was initially developed by the U.S. military and has been proven to produce sounder working dogs. By 16 weeks, a puppy's brain is about 80% developed, so the importance of those first weeks with the breeder can't be ignored.

### ***Someone You Can Talk To.***

I have read dozens of articles on how to pick a good breeder over the years, but not one has ever mentioned this. You will have a connection with your breeder for the life of your puppy, and this is the person you will want to go to if you have a question or a problem. It needs to be someone who will respond when you call or message; someone who will listen and help you sort out your concerns; someone you feel comfortable speaking with on the phone; someone who looks for a solution rather than trying to place blame; someone you trust and can have a long-term relationship with. Buying from a foreign breeder is not a good idea unless you are an experienced owner and well-connected in the breed because of the difficulty with communication. The language barrier alone makes it hard to understand someone who speaks a different language, and customs, veterinary practices, and available resources can be quite different from one country to the next. Being able to relate and communicate is the key to any good relationship, and your relationship with your breeder is no different.

### ***Supports Breed Rescue***

Purebred dogs are only produced by breeders. They don't just happen by two random dogs getting together in the street. Therefore, taking care of the breed is a joint responsibility of all Tibetan Mastiff breeders. A breeder who says they do their "own" rescue, may in fact be taking care of their own dogs, but is taking a selfish approach and is not contributing to the welfare of the breed as a whole. Protecting and preserving the Tibetan Mastiff has to be a community effort. Whether it is a fellow breeder or a dog in need, a responsible breeder will

lend a hand when called upon. We have one breed Rescue, Tibetan Mastiff Rescue, Inc. Support a breeder who supports our rescue.

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