

Tips on Finding A Field Spaniel Breeder

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When looking for a Field Spaniel, there are a number of things that you will need to review. Doing YOUR homework will help assure that the Field Spaniel you bring into your home is the best possible choice for you. **While the Field Spaniel is a lovely breed, it is NOT the right breed for every home.** You must make an informed choice: read all the information you can find about the Field Spaniel breed and talk to several breeders. While a responsible breeder will ask many questions of you, it is a two-way interview. You've decided that a Field Spaniel is the right dog for your home. It is now up to you to determine whether a particular breeder is the one from whom you will acquire your Field Spaniel. **Ask yourself, "do I feel comfortable talking with this person?"** After all, you may need to talk to the breeder a number of times over the life of your Field Spaniel (and, a responsible breeder will want you to keep in touch).

Ten Questions to Ask a Breeder

Question 1. Does the breeder show and work their Field Spaniels?

This often indicates an involvement with the the breed in general and the dogs in their home in particular. If you are interested in showing or performance activities, what is the breeder's history in producing animals of the desired quality? You may say, "I don't want to show my dog, I want a companion in my home." That's great. But it is still important that a Field Spaniel look like a Field Spaniel. One of the many things a responsible breeder is concerned with is breed "type" - all those things that make a Field Spaniel different from other spaniels. In addition to type, working ability and trainability are part of temperament and personality and therefore part of the predictability expected from a purebred dog. Field Spaniels should be trainable, birdy, have a good nose, and be both adaptable and able to get along with other dogs. The Field Spaniel should also have the structure that allows the dog to hunt or play all day.

Question 2. What health problems are known in this breed and does the breeder seek clearances for these things?

Have health problems appeared either in the sire/dam or the littermates of the sire/dam? Has the sire or dam produced a particular problem frequently in the past? This should give you an overall feel for the general health of the breeder's animals. Know the types of health concerns in Field Spaniels ahead of time and ask specifically about them. Talk candidly with the breeder and seek to understand the breeder's philosophy when it comes to health issues.

Question 3: Can I have copies of the pedigree, AKC registration and health check certification for the sire/dam?

A minimum three-generation pedigree should be readily available to you. Photocopies of AKC registration and a listing of health testing of the sire/dam should be supplied. In addition, photos of the sire and dam will be helpful to you. You can verify health information by going to the OFA website at www.offa.org and doing a search for the sire and dam.

Question 4: What deposit is required? Is it refundable? What exactly does it "reserve"?

Breeders may require a deposit as an indication of how serious you are about purchasing a puppy. Know ahead of time whether or not a deposit is required and what that deposit means so that there are no surprises. Some breeders will allow you to pick from a group of puppies, others will not and prefer to match each puppy according to personality of the puppy and requirements of the buyer. This "matching" may mean that puppy testing is done. This is a series of standardized "tests" which assist the breeder in determining each puppy's individual personality attributes and potential for performance and other endeavors. You can learn more about puppy testing by searching the internet for "puppy aptitude testing".

Question 5. How many litters does the breeder produce in a year? How does the breeder raise their puppies?

While it is difficult to say how many litters a year are too many, the responsible breeder puts a considerable amount of time and energy into raising a litter well. Puppies are ideally raised within a home environment, receiving large amounts of attention. Puppies should be accustomed to routine grooming including having nails trimmed, clipping hair and brushing. Initial leash-training should be started and the puppy should be well acquainted with being in a crate and separated from its littermates. If your puppy must take a plane ride to get to your home, the puppy will do quite well if he or she already is familiar with and adapted to a crate. If possible, take the time to go visit the breeder and see for yourself the type of setting in which your puppy will be or is raised. If you cannot go see the breeder due to distance involved, then ask questions about how puppies are reared.

Question 6. Are there any terms to be met? Is there a contract, and, if so, can I see it ahead of time?

If you are going to the breeder's home to pick up your puppy, that is NOT the time to read a contract and fully understand the meaning of the contract...not when you have that cute little puppy face looking at you! Puppies sold as companion animals who will not be shown and who should not be bred from, are often sold with a limited registration and/or on spay/neuter contracts. The responsible breeder carefully places each puppy or dog; not selling to just anyone with ready cash to spend. This breeder wants the puppy or dog back if it is no longer wanted, no matter how old the puppy or dog might be at the time. This is often specified clearly in a written contract. In addition, a written contract should clearly specify what is guaranteed, what is not guaranteed, and the extent of the guarantee. (See Question 7). Finally, does the breeder require a co-ownership? If so, BE VERY SURE you fully understand what this co-ownership entails—what is in it for you and what is in it for the breeder. Co-ownerships can be great, or they can be a disaster.

Question 7. If something goes wrong, what is the remedy?

Does the breeder refund money, replace the animal, require that you return your Field Spaniel prior to refund or replacement, or reimburse for medical expenses due to inherited disorders and to what maximum sum? Is this set forth in writing or by verbal agreement? The responsible breeder keeps careful records and considers health a high priority; they learn about how diseases are inherited, test their own dogs for such diseases, and select mates who have been tested to minimize the possibility of inherited disorders. Discuss issues regarding "what happens if something goes wrong" before you buy since ALL dogs can inherit and pass on hereditary defects even when utmost care is taken to avoid these problems.

Question 8. What is the price for puppies? Does it differ for show quality versus pet/companion animal quality?

It is unlikely that every puppy in a litter is truly a show (and potentially breeding) quality animal. Some breeders make a differentiation in the price of a puppy sold as show quality versus companion quality; some do not. This grading of puppies as "show" or "pet" generally has to do with things such as size, markings, type and so forth. For example, a puppy may be graded as pet quality by a breeder because the puppy may be on the smaller side or perhaps the shoulder angulation is a bit straighter than ideal for the show ring or perhaps the eyes are too round and so forth. None of these types of things make a lot of difference as to whether or not the animal will be a great companion in your home, but may mean that the puppy should not be bred from when mature. Prices for puppies are set by individual breeders, so this is a question you will need to ask.

Question 9. Is there a waiting list? When is a litter planned?

Responsible breeders generally plan their litters carefully and may have people waiting for puppies. It is often necessary to wait for a Field Spaniel, particularly if you want a puppy. When you find a breeder that you wish to work with, be prepared to wait for the puppy of your dreams.

Question 10. When can I get my puppy? What shipping or pick-up arrangements have to be made?

Do not be surprised if your breeder will not allow you to get your puppy until 10 weeks of age. Sometimes puppies may be allowed to go to new homes as young as 8 weeks but often you will find that you must wait until the puppy is 10 to 12 weeks of age. At Calico Field Spaniels, puppies are not generally placed in their new homes until 10 weeks of age for the following reasons: 1) Puppies need to have a final veterinarian check for health; 2) Puppies need to have their eyes checked by a veterinary eye specialist; 3) Final evaluation of structure and temperament is more certain at 10 weeks of age which may be important for someone who wishes to purchase a puppy for conformation showing or specific performance activities.

For a rare breed like the Field Spaniel, it is not often that you will be able to purchase a puppy or dog within the general locale of your home. The puppy or dog may need to be shipped from across the continent, after lengthy negotiations. Shipping is generally safe if done properly, though some breeders will require that YOU fly in to pick up your puppy and fly the puppy home with you in a carry on bag.

For further information on choosing a breeder and selecting a puppy, the American Kennel Club has a number of publications available to you. The Dog Buyer's Education Packet and the Breeder/Buyer's Guide are recommended. Both are available from AKC Customer Service (5580 Centerview Drive, Raleigh, NC 27606; (919) 233-9767.