

You have a dog you think is wonderful, one that is so perfect and so much a part of your family that you believe you want another dog just like him or her. You have the time, money, and desire. Why not bring another four-legged family member into your home?

There are many ways to satisfy your need for a dog (or, as is often the case, more dogs).

Shelters have some wonderful dogs, sometimes discarded for reasons more human than dog. A dog can end up in a shelter because of their human's new marriage, new baby, move to a new location, allergies, or simply growing tired of the responsibilities of owning a dog. But you have to know what to look for. Watch out for those dogs who have personality or health problems or have been discarded because they are not good pets.

Although an admirable choice, the dog you adopt from a shelter won't be just like yours.

"What about a pet store?" you ask. "I've seen lots of cute little puppies there."

There are many, many objectionable things about buying a puppy from a pet store. The cute puppies you see there generally come from a puppy mill where the sire¹ and dam live in filthy, overcrowded cages with food that barely maintains them, little or no medical care, and almost no contact with humans. The dam is bred every time she comes into heat until she is too old to produce puppies at which time she is discarded or more likely destroyed.

Don't buy from a pet store. You're supporting the inhumane treatment of dogs when you do.

And again, this puppy won't be a dog just like yours.

Show breeders often have puppies they consider unfit for the show ring. In general, there is nothing wrong with the puppy. It's just not a good example of the breed standard (the characteristics considered ideal for that breed and on which the dog is judged) and will not do well in competition. However, there are drawbacks to purchasing a dog from a show breeder.

Granted, the puppy is more likely to be the picture of good health. Show dogs are an investment, and most owners take care of that investment. But many breeders keep

¹ "Sire" and "dam" are used when referring to the parents of a particular puppy. When discussed generally, "dog" refers to male dogs and "bitch" to females.

their adult dogs alone in cages, not only to prevent injuries and damage to the dog's appearance that might affect their standing in the show ring but also to keep the dog focused on training for showing. This hampers socialization — exposure of the dog to interaction with humans.

After a puppy is weaned,² show breeders generally remove the puppy from its mother for the same reason, resulting in the loss of some valuable mother-puppy learning time. Again, socialization is hampered, as the puppies are often caged alone until a decision is made about showing them. Consequently, they don't receive much human attention and don't learn to interact with humans. Further hampering socialization and bonding, show breeders generally keep puppies for a longer time to make certain the puppy is not a good candidate for competition.

This is not the dog you're looking for. This is not a dog just like yours.

There are also people who breed dogs as a hobby, usually referred to as "backyard breeders" by show breeders who have a low, usually unwarranted opinion of hobby breeders. However, wonderful puppies can be obtained from hobby breeders who are responsible and truly love dogs. If you educate yourself on what to look for and the questions to ask, buying a puppy from a hobby breeder can be a very positive experience and result in a new family member you'll cherish as much as the dog you now have.

But the puppy won't be just like your dog.

There's another way to acquire a new family member. You want a puppy just like the one you have that you love so much, and you decide that the best way to acquire that new family member is to breed your own.

But what other reasons for breeding your dog are lurking in the back of your mind?

The one I've heard most often is "I want my children to see the miracle of birth." Chances are, unless your children are old enough to experience the miracle of birth themselves, they will be left with only a very disturbing and often misunderstood memory. The picture that will stick with your child is the sight of blood — and lots of it — along with other generally unidentifiable bodily fluids.

And the puppy that eventually emerges is not the fuzzy, cute, cuddly baby you think of when you visualize puppies but a slimy, sac-covered, blind, rat-like being that only a mother could love. In many cases, the dam doesn't clean the puppy, and to save it, you have to clean the slime off, clear the nasal passages so it can breathe, massage its chest to stimulate and regulate its heartbeat, and massage its genital region to encourage it to suckle. Despite your best efforts, the puppy is likely to die.

² A puppy is weaned when it quits nursing and eats solid food.

Most children are unable to see the miracle in this and come away with horrific visions of the reality of what their canine friend has just gone through.

Running a close second among popular reasons is the opportunity to make some money. Breeding is a very expensive hobby. Not only do you have to buy the best food and supplements to ensure that your bitch is healthy and ready to carry, whelp,³ and nurse a litter of puppies, there are other purchases you will have to make.

A whelping box where your bitch can deliver the litter is probably the most important. You can make a whelping box if you're handy with a saw and hammer, but lumber is not cheap and safe whelping boxes are not necessarily easy to build.

You will see your veterinarian multiple times before your dog whelps for exams and tests. If she has problems whelping, you will have the expense of an animal emergency center (because these things never happen during office hours) plus the expense of the post-emergency care provided by your veterinarian.

And the expenses don't stop when the puppies are born. Quality bitch's milk supplement or substitute if needed is expensive and so is quality puppy food because puppies can't eat the same food given to their adult mother. The puppies will also have their own vet visits — for immunizations, deworming, and any quasi-surgical procedures called for by the breed standard. If you don't want to alter the puppies' bodies to satisfy breed standards, the puppies may not sell as easily.

Make a little money? You won't even break even ... even if you are able to sell all the puppies except the one you want.

Breeding a puppy just like the one you have is impossible. A basic knowledge of genetics will show the futility of expecting a clone. In dogs, much more than in humans, personality traits are inherited. That's exactly what you want, isn't it? You want another dog just like the one you have. It won't happen. Your new puppy will have not only the traits of its parent that you love so much but also the traits of its other parent, which you may not find so attractive.

You also have to keep in mind the strong possibility of reinforcing undesirable traits. In a small genetic pool such as that of specific breeds of purebred dogs in a small geographical area, the chance of harmful recessive traits from the sire and the dam combining in the puppy are much, much greater than the chance of the same thing happening in humans.

The combination of these recessive genes can affect the personality of the puppy as well as health conditions it may inherit. Of course, you can always investigate the sire and dam's lines for health problems, but these are genes that only show up when both parents contribute the recessive gene. Probably the only records you will be able

³ "Whelp" is the birth of a litter of puppies.

to obtain are those of dogs registered with the American Kennel Club. The records will be slim, usually only of your puppy's breeding line, and puppies with inherited health conditions are not usually registered.

The final and most important thing to keep in mind when deciding to breed your dog is what you will do with the puppies. While some breeds generally have only a few puppies in a litter, other breeds tend to give birth to many puppies at one time. Even with breeds that have small litters, it's doubtful that you will want to keep all of them, except that those children you traumatized with the miracle of birth will want to keep every one of these small, fuzzy, big-eyed babies.⁴

What will you do with the rest of the litter? Sell them? There are drawbacks to selling puppies in terms of your decision about the type of person you will allow to buy your puppies, whether you will require that the new owner return the puppy to you if they are unable to keep it, and even whether you can find enough people who want to purchase a puppy.

Friends will want them? For the most part, the friendship (and maybe even the puppy) will suffer after your friend realizes he's been tricked by the offer of a warm, wiggly, tail-wagging puppy, especially if you approach the friend's child first.

That leaves you with a couple of choices: Keep and raise more puppies than you want, which will result in a bigger mess and less attention to each dog, or turn them over to a shelter, a heartbreaking and unacceptable decision.

You'll have to give up your quest for a puppy just like the dog you love so much. If you bring in a new family member, you will have to love him for his own qualities, not for how closely he resembles the pet you already have.

Once you overcome that obstacle, your best bet for a quality puppy is the hobby breeder. If you know what to look for, a hobby breeder can provide wonderful, well-loved companions who will fit into your family beautifully.

A last comment: Unless you're prepared to breed as a hobby or as an occupation, SPAY OR NEUTER your dog. A true dog lover will not want to contribute to the enormous problem of unwanted pets.

⁴ This is how I ended up with seven dogs. You'll know you've lost the battle when the children begin naming the newborns.