

NOW THAT YOU ARE A LEO-PUPPY SEEKER....

Lets assume you did a lot of homework about different breeds and you have decided that the Leonberger is a good breed for you and your living situation. You have met a couple of Leonbergers in person, ideally not only at shows but also on their home turf. Now you are looking for a puppy – actually you are looking for a good breeder.

The Leonberger Club of America (LCA)

The LCA helps you to narrow down your choice of breeders in the U.S. LCA membership kennels have to follow a minimum set of rules established by the breeding regulations of the Club. All dogs passed by the LCA for meeting the minimum requirements for breeding are evaluated and rated according to the breed standard. The so-called “Breeding Acceptability Check List” (BACL) includes a description of the physical parameters of the dog. Ask the breeder for a copy of the BACL form for both parents and study it carefully. All LCA breeding dogs must be OFA certified free of hip and elbow dysplasia. The LCA is in the process of including test for eye problems (CERF) and thyroid testing (TT4, TT3, FT4d, cTSH, TgAA, T4AA, T3AA) as one of the requirements for breeding dogs. Since these are new regulations and are only required once but recommended to be repeated at a regular basis, it is the puppy buyers responsibility to inquire about the complete health status, tests and history of the breeding dogs. You should also be aware that the LCA does not interfere with any mating decisions the breeder makes unless the breeding dogs are rated Category II (see BACL form) because of specific issues that need extra consideration (e.g. teeth/bite issues, eye issues).

Research, research, research....

Finding the right breeder means finding someone in whom you have confidence, trust and faith. Different breeders have different approaches to breeding their dogs, have different philosophies, goals and methods. You should try to find someone whose ideas about what they hope to achieve with their puppies, how to raise a puppy and live with dogs is very similar to yours. You will find that different breeders have different opinions about the right and wrong way to select a breeding pair, raise a pup, and place the puppies in a good home.

The best way to approach your search is to gather as much information as possible. Read books and visit the internet to learn about line-breeding, inbreeding, out-crossing, “like to like”, heritability of traits etc. This way you can better evaluate the breeding your potential puppy has come from. Do not necessarily settle on the first breeder you contact, even if they have puppies available and ready to go. In fact, many good breeders have waiting lists for prospective owners, so take special caution if you find someone willing to offer you a puppy right away (even though you might come back to that breeder, having done more research, after all).

Most likely, your relationship with your breeder will last far beyond the time when you bring the puppy into your home. You should be confident that your breeder is someone who will be there for you and your puppy throughout the life of your Leonberger. This is particularly true for first-time owners, because no matter how much research you do, you will have important questions and concerns that only a good breeder can answer. Moreover, you will be entering into a contractual relationship with your breeder that may affect your ownership rights and obligations for years to come. If you can't trust your breeder, then you've chosen the wrong breeder!

Be patient!

Don't be discouraged by waiting lists. The breed is rare, and demand is greater than the supply of quality puppies. Finding the right breeder should be far more important than finding an available puppy. You can always use the time to learn more about the breeder and the breed. And, when you finally bring home your “wittle weo”, it will be all the more special because you took the time to make the right decision.

Remember: Make sure the breeder is a member in good standing of the Leonberger Club of America and the kennel is a LCA registered kennel. Do not trust newspaper ads unless you thoroughly investigate the situation. When in doubt, get some advice from an experienced LCA member before proceeding. Be smart!

What makes a breeder a better breeder?

They specialize in the breed and know its strengths and weaknesses.

They value sound temperament as the most important aspect of a dog.

They research and strive to minimize genetic defects and diseases.

They are there for you with advice and information whenever you need it.

They take pride and time in properly taking care of their litters and socialize them well.

They can get you started in participating in club events, obedience, conformation and therapy work.

They put the welfare of the dogs first and do not necessarily expect to make money on a litter and are prepared to lose money.

They breed Leonbergers because they love the breed and want to create better dogs for their puppy buyers.

Many questions need to be asked

You will find that most Leonberger breeders are very diligent about selecting prospective puppy buyers. You should expect to be asked lots of questions about your family, your home, your lifestyle, your job, your schedule and your expectations of your future Leonberger. Any reputable breeder will want to make sure that potential owners are knowledgeable and committed, and that the Leonberger is the right breed for them. Answer honestly, it is not a test but the conversation, hopefully, will help you and the breeder to make the right choices. At the same time, you should also ask questions. It is very likely that you will choose a breeder or breeders months before the puppies are actually born. Your goal should be finding a breeder that you like, respect and agree with in terms of their breeding philosophy (this will have a large impact on your future puppy). You should have the same or similar views on what a Leonberger needs in his/her life, on development and training issues. You need to understand and agree with the breeder's goals, general philosophy and the breeding decision of the mating in question. Your breeder should be a resource to you in the future and you should be comfortable with the idea of turning to the breeder when questions arise. In reality, you are more likely to choose a breeder and not a puppy – keep that in mind.

What are good questions?

It is absolutely critical that you know to ask the right questions so you can make an informed decision. Make sure you have the breeder's name, address, telephone number and possibly e-mail. Although not a complete list, the following questions are an excellent start for you to think about what you want to eventually know about your breeder and the particular litter you might get a puppy from. DO NOT plan to rattle through every question with every breeder. Instead, use a couple of questions that are really important to you and start with them. Then, as the breeder gets to know you better, you can continue your education as well. The only wrong way to buy a puppy is not to ask any questions at all.

1. THE BREEDER

Are you a member of the LCA, since when? Are you active in the club? Can you provide me with references for you and your dogs, ideally from previous puppy buyers, other breeders, your veterinarian?

2. AVAILABILITY

Do you have puppies available right now? Are you expecting or planning a litter? What are your future breeding plans? Do you have a waiting list and if yes how long is it? What is the likelihood that I might be able to get a puppy from you? What do I have to do regarding reservations? Do you have a questionnaire I should fill out? Do you have a reservation contract? If I place a deposit with you, under what conditions will/can my deposit be returned? Are you aware of other breeders I might contact?

3. BREEDING PROGRAM

How long have you been a breeder? How many dogs do you have? How often do you breed a litter of puppies? How many litters have you produced? How many litters have you bred this year? What is your main emphasis in your breeding program? What are your personal goals in your breeding program? Do you breed other breeds? Is breeding Leonberger a full-time job, or a hobby? What can you tell me about the longevity background of the dogs in your pedigree? What is the oldest Leonberger you have produced? What have your dogs died of and at what ages?

4. PARENTS OF PUPPIES

Sire's stats (name, age, temperament, height, weight, etc.) and dam's stats (name, age, temperament, height, weight, etc.)? Can I see either or both parents in person? Do you have photographs of close relatives or do they even live with you? Can I have a copy of pedigrees on current and future litters? What titles (working, confirmation), awards, have these dogs won/been awarded? What are the strengths and weaknesses of the sire and dam? Why did you decide to breed these two dogs?

5. HIP & ELBOW DYSPLASIA, OCD

What can you tell me about the orthopedic background of the dogs in your pedigree (and siblings)? Are parents, aunts and uncles, half siblings and grandparents clear (for hips and elbows)? Can I see (get a copy of) the "BACL" (Breeding Acceptability Check List) of both parents. Statistically speaking, what have you been producing as far as clear orthopedics in your litters?

6. OTHER HEALTH ISSUES

Have there been reported cases of cancer in your line? If so, what type(s) and where in the pedigree has it occurred? Has either of the parents been assessed for thyroid problems? Bloat? Autoimmune Diseases? Allergies? Other? Are the parents certified free from hereditary eye disease Like cataracts? When was the last CERF examination? Have any puppies you bred had any of these problems? Were there any developmental health problems with other off-springs of the parents (i.e., parvo, pano etc.)?

[Remember, there are health issues in every line and every dog – there are no perfect dogs. It is important that the breeder is aware of those issues and addressed them in his/her breeding decision. A breeder who says, I do not have any health issues in "my" line, is either avoiding the issue or has not done enough research].

7. CONTRACTS/GUARANTEES

Will there be a contract? What is included? Can I have a copy of your contract to review? What guarantees are given under the contract? At what level does the guarantee come into effect, and who or what decides

this? If there is a replacement puppy, what happens to the initial dog purchased? Do you and if yes how do you differentiate between pet and show quality puppies? Do you require spaying/neutering for pet quality pups? If so, what are my obligations?

8. EARLY DEVELOPMENT ISSUES/PLACEMENT

What type of temperaments are you aiming to produce? Do you temperament test? What do you do in raising puppies to help produce well-rounded temperaments? Have your temperaments and working ability in your dogs/line been confirmed through obedience, draft, tracking or agility competition? At what age do you let your puppies go? What training will they come with? What will you be providing me in terms of information with the puppy? How involved as a breeder do you want to be in the raising of this puppy? Will he/she be crate trained when I get this puppy? What do you recommend (or not recommend) for feeding the pups? When do you recommend switching to adult food? If the food not readily available in a grocery store where can I get it? How much is it? What vitamin supplements, if any, are recommended? Are your dogs kennel or house dogs? Are your puppies raised in the kennel or house? What do you do to socialize the pups? With people? With other dogs? Tell me your thoughts on immunization for this pup? X-rays? Elbow and hip certification? Will you keep a refundable deposit for health tests?

9. BREEDER/OWNER INTERACTION/SUPPORT

Are you available as a resource for information re: problems with puppy? Would you be willing to take the pup for a week while we are on vacation?

If you don't understand what some of the questions mean, then ask a knowledgeable dog friend! The breeder should be happy that you've done your homework and know what questions to ask, but do not overwhelm the breeder up front, take your time. As far as selecting a puppy, you might not have a choice. Many breeders will do the selection themselves. This may involve temperament and personality testing, and this may also be a function of dividing whether a particular puppy is promising to become breeding stock or not. The breeder should try to best match each puppy with the prospective owners. If you trust your breeder, then trust their selection.

Last but not least, resources to take advantage of!

We recommend for you to join the LCA (Leonberger Club of America) as soon as you decided that the Leonberger is your breed. The club offers many resources including a quarterly publication with lots of pictures, stories about our dogs, show results, breeding and litter announcements, names of the club officials and an informative web page <http://www.LeonbergerClubofAmerica.com> with quite a bit of information and pictures. We are a fun loving group of people who are set on protecting our breed as well as enjoying them as much as possible – don't be shy do join us (see attachment). If you are interested there is also an e-mail list of Leonberger fancier from all over the world. In order to join the list go to <http://www.Leonberger.com/LeoWorld/leolist.html> and sign up. Browse the archives, many questions of puppy seekers and new puppy owners have been discussed already – if you have a new one, this is a great place to ask it.

Now you should be pretty well prepared to start searching for your new companion. Remember be patient, keep reading and learning along the way. We are looking forward to welcome you one of these days (even before you actually have a puppy) at a picnic, a show, or a walk. Join us in our love and commitment to the breed.