

Before you purchase that Golden Puppy
Advice from Marcia Kardatzke, member Golden Retriever Club of America
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There is nothing cuter than a golden retriever puppy but please be informed BEFORE you buy a purebred dog.

Reputable breeders will not be offended by polite questions concerning their dogs. A little research now may save you heartache in the long run. And remember: Do not take the kids to see “Fluffy’s” puppies UNTIL you’ve done your homework over the phone. No matter how awful the breeder might be, it is very difficult to ignore a cute fluffy puppy. Ask questions BEFORE you look. If you don’t like the answers, move on.

Now is not the time to “bargain hunt”. A well-bred puppy can run \$1000 to \$1500--a small investment for a lifetime of joy! You may know of someone who has purchased a dog from a pet store, a [backyard breeder](#), or even a [puppy mill](#) and had great success. Beyond the [animal cruelty](#) concerns associated with puppy mills/pet stores, the growing incidence of health problems makes it prudent to be on guard. Temperament problems, hip and elbow dysplasia, eye problems, heart defects, swallowing disorders, allergies, epilepsy, thyroid disease, and cancer are among the growing problems we face.

Where do you find a responsible breeder? [Responsible breeders](#) will only breed when they have a waiting list of puppy buyers. They don’t generally advertise in the newspaper. They will not sell to pet shops or place signs out on their front lawn.

1. Ask the Breeder: What clubs or organizations do you belong to? These include Kennel Clubs, rescue organizations, and breed-specific clubs. A good breeder will belong to local and national clubs and sign a code of ethics. They will be active in some level of dog sport.

2. Ask the Breeder: What [dog-related activities](#) do you participate in? These include obedience titles, tracking, agility, hunting, conformation showing, search and rescue, K9, service dog training, therapy dogs, etc.

3. Ask the Breeder: How long have you been involved with this breed? What others have you bred? You will probably want to avoid anyone who has switched breeds every couple of years, from one popular breed to another. Look for someone who has considerable experience with the breed you are interested in. Be wary of breeders who have multiple breeds. It is not uncommon to find breeders with several breeds. But, a breeder producing litters of many different breeds of dog at the same time may not be your best source of information and probably should be suspected as being a puppy mill or a disreputable breeder.

4. Ask the Breeder: How often do you breed and how many times has this bitch been bred? Breeding every heat cycle IS TOO OFTEN and may indicate that profit is the primary motive for the breeding.

5. Ask the Breeder: Do both parents (the sire and dam) have hip and elbow clearances from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) or from Penn Hip? A veterinarian can perform these x-rays to send in to be certified by the OFA or Penn Hip. Ask to see and review the actual certificates. “My vet says the hips look good” is not a valid clearance. You can also check clearances with the [OFA](#) online if you know either

the dog's AKC registration number or the register name of the dog (see <http://www.offa.org>).

6. Ask the Breeder: Are both the sire and dam at least 2 years old? Final hip and elbow clearances cannot become permanent until 24 months of age. The golden is not considered mature before that time.

7. Ask the Breeder: Are all four grandparents and siblings of the parents tested for these clearances? A responsible breeder will keep track of these statistics and will honestly discuss any problems that have occurred in the lines and what steps he/she is taking to prevent the problems from re-occurring.

8. Ask the Breeder: Are both Golden parents free of allergies, hot spots, skin problems, and recurring ear infections? Dogs with allergies and/or epilepsy should not be bred.

9. Ask the Breeder: Do both parents have current eye clearances? They should be checked yearly and certified as normal by a Board-certified ophthalmologist. For information about eye diseases visit <http://www.vet.purdue.edu/~yshen/cerf.html> Alaska currently has a Board-certified ophthalmologist in headAnchorage who routinely also services the Fairbanks area. There should be no excuse for not checking breeding stock yearly.

10. Ask the Breeder: Do both parents have a heart check for sub-aortic stenosis (SAS) by a Board-certified cardiologist? Alaska does not currently have a Board-certified cardiologist. Breeders hold clinics yearly and/or take their breeding stock to the lower-48 for health checks.

11. Ask the Breeder: Have both parents been tested for thyroid disease? Thyroid testing is done at Cornell University and the University of Michigan. The OFA now provides a registry for thyroid screening. Screening for thyroid abnormalities should be done annually from ages one to six.

WARNING: Avoid breeders who say it is too expensive to test for the above clearances!

12. Ask the Breeder: What kind of congenital defects are present in this breed? What steps are you taking to decrease genetic defects in the breed? Avoid anyone who says "none", or "not in my dogs!" There are genetic problems present in every breed.

Ask the Breeder: Are both Golden parents free of epilepsy? Idiopathic epilepsy, which is hard to diagnose, results in recurrent seizures which have no apparent environmental or physiological trigger. Inherited epilepsy may appear between one and three years of age or as late as age five. Currently, there remains no registry or certification for the epilepsy-free dogs.

Ask the Breeder: Are both Golden parents free from esophageal (swallowing) disorders?

Ask the Breeder: Will you take the dog back at any time, for any reason, if I cannot keep it? A "yes" answer is the hallmark of responsible breeding (and the quickest, best way to make rescue obsolete).

Ask the Breeder: Are the majority of titled dogs (the initials CH, OTCH, CD, JH, WC, etc. before or

after the names) in the parent's and grandparent's generations? The term "champion lines" means nothing if those titles are back three or more generations; or if there are only one or two in the whole pedigree.

Find out if the breeder is knowledgeable about raising puppies, critical neonatal periods, and proper socialization techniques . Puppies raised without consistent exposure to gentle handling, human contact, and a wide variety of noises and experiences –OR—are removed from their dam or litter mates before at least 7 weeks may exhibit a wide variety of behavioral problems! Temperament, a genetic trait carried over from the parents, still needs development from the early beginnings of a puppy's life. The breeder should provide extensive socialization and human interaction to the puppies in the litter.

Ask the Breeder: Are the dogs friendly? Do they have good temperaments? Have the puppies' temperaments been evaluated and can he/she guide you to the puppy that will best suit your lifestyle? A very shy puppy will not do well in a noisy household with small children. Conversely, a very dominant puppy won't flourish in a sedate senior citizen's household. A caring breeder will know the puppies and be able to show you how to test them so that good matches can be made.

When visiting the litter , do not be offended if the breeder prohibits contact before 4 weeks of age. When the puppies are old enough to be seen, expect to be asked to remove shoes and wash your hands. Expect to be asked not to visit if you have been around any potentially ill dog.

Observe the puppies: Do they seem healthy with no discharge from eyes or nose, no loose stools, no foul smelling ears? Their coats should be soft, full and clean. They should have plenty of energy when awake, yet calm down easily when gently stroked. The puppies must have clean water and clean surroundings to thrive. The yard and kennel areas should be free of feces, urine and debris. What are your overall feelings about the puppies' environment and the breeder? Trust your instincts.

When ready to go home, ask the Breeder: Are the puppies at least 7 to 8 weeks old? Do the puppies have their first shots and have they been wormed?

Have you read EVERYTHING you can about goldens? Please visit the website of the [Golden Retriever Club of America](http://www.goldenretrieverclub.com).

And as cute as puppies are, have you considered a rescue dog? There are rescue groups throughout the country looking for loving, qualified homes. A homeless Golden can be your devoted companion, and you will get an extra jewel in your crown for helping a needy dog. A list of rescue organizations can also be found at www.grca.org.