

BEFORE YOU BREED - THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

by Kathleen Dillon

You bought yourself a quality dog, from a reputable breeder and as she's matured she developed into a "good prospect". You've trained her, she's well socialized, you've hunted with her and she does very well afield. The better she does in the field, the more you think you should breed her. But the world of dog breeding is new terrain for you, an unfamiliar world and you don't really know the proper steps to take or what to expect. Maybe you just think you should breed her because you've heard "it's good for a female to have at least one litter."

Before you take the step to breed your female, there are some considerations and questions to ask yourself. Research as much on the subject as possible, talk to other "one dog owners" who have bred, and consider the following points and questions seriously before taking on the responsibility of six or eight living creatures who's future lay in your hands.

IS YOUR FEMALE OF BREEDING QUALITY?

What is breeding quality, you may ask? You should have a copy of the official breed standard for the Epagneul Breton (French Brittany), if not, you can find one on this web site. Remember, the standard for any breed is the "perfect" type for the breed and no dog is absolutely perfect. However, be honest when you evaluate your dog against the standard. Minor variations from the standard are overlooked (within degrees) even in a show ring, but anything past that, or any major faults and especially eliminating faults should bring a halt to your consideration at once. Next, consider the dog's temperament - still within type for the french brittany? Then go on to her health.

Have you had her hips certified with OFFA? Is she free of any congenital defects that could be inherited? If not, DO NOT breed her, no matter how much you love her. All bitches should be examined by a veterinarian before breeding to determine if there are any inheritable health concerns and also to determine if she is in good health for the pregnancy, whelping and caring of a litter of pups. A female must be in top shape before being asked to go through such a rigorous ordeal. Females who are overweight can have problems whelping, females who are underweight can have problems carrying the pups to term and/or providing enough nourishment for healthy puppies. And there is no more difficult task then raising a litter of pups by hand!!

A final consideration on the part of the female is her hunting ability. Have you satisfied yourself that she has the natural hunting ability, intelligence and birdiness that is desirable for the dam of a litter to possess so that those genetics can be passed on to her offspring?

WHAT ABOUT THE STUD?

As the saying goes, it takes two to tango - so, have you given any thought to what stud you will use for the breeding? All of the above considerations that are outlined for the bitch should go into the choosing of the stud as well. Don't use a stud just because it's handy, or it's the closest one within driving distance! That stud is going to provide the other half of the genetics that those pups you're considering will inherit.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO BREED HER?

If you intend to recoup some of the money you spent on your dog, or you think it would be an interesting experiment for your family - don't breed her, that's not a responsible reason for breeding. The excitement of a first litter wears off quickly with all the extra work it causes, and the breeding is unlikely to be profitable once all expenses are accounted for.

Breeding, whelping, raising and selling a litter of pups requires a great deal of time,

work, worry and commitment. Your utmost desire for breeding should be of one to contribute to the breed. If you don't feel totally committed and more excited about making a possible contribution to the breed as a whole, then having a litter of pups may turn into a nuisance rather than the "interesting experience" you had expected. The cost of basic expenses will include: stud fee, transportation of bitch for breeding, veterinary care for the mother (pre and post natal), veterinary care for the pups (dewclaw removal, shots, worming and health certificates at minimum), litter registrations, feeding extras, advertising. This could easily amount to a minimum of \$1000. If mother or pups develop any serious problems that amount could escalate into really serious numbers.

Have you thought about what you'll do if you don't have all the pups sold prior to time for the litter to go home? Will you be willing to start house training the pups that are left? You can't just leave them in a kennel or they'll be adversely affected, that age is an important time for bonding and beginning their training and a very important time to continue their socialization and their exposure to the world and different experiences.

WHAT ABOUT YOUR LIFESTYLE?

Will your lifestyle allow you the necessary time it takes to: study pedigrees and visit places to select the stud. Then, once she comes into season, you'll have to transport her to the stud's kennel (that's your responsibility). Heat cycles cannot always be timed exactly, so you have to be prepared to drop everything and get her there because timing is of the essence for a successful mating. If there is a long distance to the stud, you'll need to leave her there for at least a week and then you'll need to return to bring her home. Even if the stud is close by, you'll need to take her back and forth for at least two breedings.

Are you prepared to be without her if you have to transport her to the stud's residence? Even after she has the litter, her interest in you and being with you will be usurped by her commitment to her pups. She'll no longer have the time to be your companion. After the ordeal of raising all those little ones, she'll need extra attention and care to get back into her "before puppies" shape.

Once the litter comes of weaning age, you step in as surrogate mom cleaning up after pups and feeding them. You won't believe what a litter of six or eight untrained pups can produce in a single day! Someone must be available four times daily for feeding time. Puppies need to be taught to eat from a bowl (it's not something they do automatically) and to stay out of the bowl while doing so. When done eating, there is always some mess to clean up on them and the floor (and usually on yourself too). Schedule in plenty of time for each feeding session!

HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT WHERE?

Chances are you're going to have to use part of your home for this undertaking. In the winter, a newborn pup needs to be kept warm, free from drafts. In the summer, they can't get too hot (if you're planning on outdoors or a garage). In the summer, air-conditioning can cause problems because of their need for warmth. You'll need to have ample space for a whelping box and room for mom (and romping puppies later) outside of the box. It should be a self-contained area with easily cleaned flooring (post-whelping discharge stains carpets). It should be an area away from the traffic of family life and visits by children should be kept at a minimum. Too much traffic or visits by curious children and well-meaning neighbors can stress the mom. (Especially during whelping!!)

As well as someone available to care for the pups, someone must be available for the socialization of the pups on a daily basis - a vital part of any pup's development that is often overlooked! If pups are not given the proper type and amount of socialization, they (and their new owners) will feel the effects for the lifetime of that dog.

RESPONSIBLE BREEDING

Responsible breeding is thoughtful, careful breeding. Don't have a litter of pups and then "hope" buyers will show up. If you haven't sold all your pups by 8 weeks, are you prepared to continue on with their training and socialization? The first 14 weeks of a pup's life are vitally important to its future development. (Another aspect to consider, and this happens to everyone who has had a litter, is the tendency to find it very difficult to part with puppies that you've cared for all those weeks, especially so for children).

As the breeder, you must be willing to stand behind your pups with a guarantee. You must also be willing, as the breeder, to assess the suitability of potential buyers as an owner of one of your pups. You have a responsibility to that living creature that you were a part of creating to do your utmost to find it a loving home with responsible owners. Turning away an unsuitable potential buyer is not always easy, but is part of your responsibility.

In summary, if it's your desire to try to duplicate the dog you currently own because you love her so much wouldn't it be better just go back to the breeder you got her from? If you still want to breed your female make sure you do your part by planning well ahead and meeting all the responsibilities of breeding.