

SPAY - NEUTERING
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Everyone who has ever owned a dog, has at one time or another wondered, "Should I breed my dog?" Even if the thought was fleeting, the temptation to reproduce what you consider to be the **BEST DOG IN THE WORLD** is there. What, you may wonder, are the criteria for breeding a dog and how should you make the decision to breed or alter your companion dog?

Dog owners, fanciers and breeders, both in the United States and elsewhere in the world, are facing some serious challenges in today's world. Pet overpopulation is a serious problem in the United States. The most recent statistics I have seen, from the Humane Society of the United States, estimate that in 1992 approximately 7.5 MILLION pets were destroyed in the United States. In a six-year time period, one unspayed bitch and her offspring can be responsible for 57,000 additional puppies! Those are **VERY** disturbing figures, especially considering the ever-increasing anti-breed and breed-specific legislation being proposed at both the local and national level. Taking all of this into consideration, it is my personal belief that the **ONLY** valid reason to breed **ANY** dog today is to **IMPROVE THE BREED!**

If your dog is a prime example of its breed, has met all of the health criteria for the breed and has something to contribute to the breed...i.e.intelligence, exceptional-not **TYPICAL**, **EXCEPTIONAL**-temperament, outstanding abilities in one or more areas of competition and demonstrates the abilities/instincts that the breed was originally designed to perform...than if you are a novice you should be advised by your breeder who produced your dog, if your breeder is a reputable hobby breeder who also competes with his/her dogs and is a member of a local and/or national breed club. Reputable breeders will tell puppy buyers up front if the puppy they are taking home is a potential show/breed prospect so you most likely already have a pretty good idea of your puppy's potential. Reputable breeders sell their pet quality puppies with spay/neuter contracts and if you signed one of these when you purchased your puppy but are now thinking about breeding, think again. You could be taken to court by the breeder for failing to live up to the terms of the contract you signed. If your puppy was sold with a limited Registration and you now feel your puppy may have some special qualities, go back to the breeder and discuss the issue with him/her. Limited Registrations can be changed to full registration, within a two year time period, at the breeder's discretion. If you purchased your puppy from a casual breeder through an ad in the paper or from a backyard breeder or puppy miller through a pet store, then chances of your puppy being show/breed quality are just about nil. These people do not start out with show/breed quality animals and you cannot breed two pet quality dogs and expect to come out with anything of exceptional quality. What you have is a wonderful companion that you should love and enjoy, but not to breed. Remember there is only **ONE** reason to breed any dog and that is to **IMPROVE** the breed. Producing more pet quality dogs will not improve the breed and may cause more over population problems down the road.

The science of dog genetics is far from exact and even reputable breeders who compete with their dogs and carefully plan every breeding with an eye to improving the breed end up with dogs that, for one reason or another, do not turn out to be breeding quality and these breeders make sure these animals are properly spayed/neutered. Spaying or neutering your companion dog will not only help decrease the pet over population problem, it will help avoid some of the more annoying hormonally-related behaviors and will also help to insure the continued good health. By altering a dog or bitch puppy **BEFORE** it reaches a sexual maturity you will insure that it will **NEVER** develop a reproductive cancer. These types of cancers feed on the reproductive hormones produced by the sexually mature animal. Early altering will prevent the hormones from

developing, depriving the cancers of their sole source of nutrition. Cancer is a leading cause of death in dogs of all breeds and mixes of breeds today. Among these cancers, reproduction cancers (in the male that would be cancer of the penis, testicles or prostate: in the bitches cancer of the vagina, ovaries, cervix, breast) are among the most common and potentially fatal. Reproductive cancers are painful, often difficult and expensive to treat and can lead to death. Of all the cancers in dogs today, reproductive cancer can be totally avoided by early spaying/neutering. It is something all pet owners should think about carefully before deciding to breed their pet. Besides avoiding reproductive cancers, early altering can greatly decrease the risk of the dog developing recurring bladder/urinary tract/prostate disease later in life and the bitch will never have to worry about prolapse uterus/vagina, pyometria, endometritis, mastitis, recurring bladder/urinary tract/vaginal infections or any number of other reproductive-related conditions that can threaten the life of a beloved pet. Breeders who are dedicated to improving the breed understand what kinds of risk they take with the long-term health of their dogs and are prepared to face what could happen in the future for the sake of improving what is, to them, the most wonderful breed in creation. Most pet owners, however, once they understand fully what could happen to their companion later in life, will make the decision to spay or neuter. It is the responsible, loving thing to do.

Besides helping to insure your companion dog's continued good health, early altering will help avoid some very undesirable behaviors that can, and all too often do, develop in the sexually active dog or bitch. The problem with these behaviors is there is no way to predict which dog or bitch will manifest some or all of them before the dog becomes sexually mature. And once some of these behaviors develop, it can be extremely difficult, if not impossible, to end them. In a dog these behaviors can range from mounting beings smaller than itself (neighbor or you own children, for example) which can result in unintentional injury to the child: marking or spraying territory (which often includes your living-room sofa or bed) with a foul-smelling substance it is difficult to remove once it permeates furnishings or their household items: increased territorial aggression which can be directed at other dogs or even at times, human beings: increased tendency to run (intact males and bitches often become escape artists. Intact males can scent a bitch in heat up to one mile away and will do their best to get at her. Bitches in season will go to great lengths to get at an intact male in the area.) When you are talking about a medium or large breed of dog, you are talking about an animal that is capable, without really meaning to, of causing great harm to fences, yards, furnishings, other dogs or even human beings (when trying to mount a child, a dog will grab the child with its front paws, often seriously scratching the child with its nails or even biting at the child to get a firmer grip. : Even small breeds or toys can cause considerable damage in these situations.

In bitches, the hormonally-caused behaviors can range from increased nervousness/distractibility/irritability (approximately 6 weeks prior to heat you will see these behaviors start. An obedience trainer friend of mine likes to say that "when a bitch goes into season, her brain goes to Florida."), increased territorial aggression directed at other dogs or even at times, human beings, some bitches have been known to mark territory at this time, increased tendency to run away/escape, increased possibility of urinary tract/bladder/vaginal infection which can cause the bitch to become incontinent in the house and then there is a bleeding that comes with the heat cycle. This bleeding can continue for 7-9 days, although another form of vaginal discharge continue after the bleeding itself stops. There are panties that can be used to help keep the blood and discharge off the furnishings and flooring in the house but many bitches refuse to wear them and eat the pads. You won't know if your bitch will accept the panties/pads or not until she is already bleeding and then, of course, there is nothing to be done if she refuses them except wait out the heat and stock up on stain remover. The entire heat cycle last for

approximately 3 weeks and during this entire time the bitch CANNOT be left alone outside, even for a short period of time because a determined male will certainly find a way to get to her and she will do her best to help him! Expect it! You will probably find an assortment of strange male dogs camped in your yard, trying to scale your fence or dog run and urinating/spraying all over your yard and house. Expect it! Bitches in heat attract males within a ONE MILE radius! The bitch will also do her best to get to one or more of the males. Expect it! You will not be able to walk her off your property, most kennels will not board a bitch in season and vets don't want them either. You will not be welcome at obedience schools.

There are so many major drawbacks to having an intact dog or bitch in the house, especially when the animal in question is a companion animal not being used in one of the many forms of competition, that it honestly is the responsible and intelligent choice to have the puppy spayed or neutered, both for the sake of the dog and the owner's sanity. In addition, I truly believe it is incumbent on all of us dog lovers and owners to put our egos and needs on hold and address the pet over population problems our country is facing now...responsible pet owners spay and neuter their pets.

There are several common reasons pet owners give for breeding their companion animals. The most common ones that I would like to address are:

There is money to be made from breeding. Think again! If the breeding was done RIGHT (and who wants a bunch of disgruntled puppy buyers camped on their doorsteps a year or two down the line, demanding their money back because they have genetically flawed or temperamentally unsound puppies? We live in a litigious society, folks, and people are no longer willing to put up with lemon puppies!), with the breeding dogs carefully cleared for any genetic defects the breed is prone to, the dogs being shown in one or more areas of competition to prove the quality of the dog or bitch, the bitch receiving the proper pre-natal care and the puppies given the proper care and socialization. there is very little money left over when the puppies are sold.

And what happens if you don't sell all the puppies? It happens, even to the best breeders! Are you prepared to house, feed and care for several puppies for six months or longer? How about returns? Will you guarantee a home for every puppy you are responsible for creating (and that means you, too, Mr. or Mrs. Stud Dog Owner!), for the LIFETIME of each puppy? Responsible breeders make this commitment to the dogs they are responsible for bringing into the world!

"I want to show my children the miracle of birth." This is a very common reason for breeding and, in my opinion, one of the worst. Most bitches seem prone to giving birth in the middle of the night, so many times young children are not awake to witness the event...which should take place with the least amount of turmoil and spectators as possible, especially with a possibly-nervous maiden bitch who could be traumatized by having too many people in attendance at this time. If any emergency situation develops and your children are there, they could witness, not the miracle birth, but the advent of death. Many puppies are born dead, even in an otherwise healthy litter. Are you prepared to explain to a young impressionable child, why a puppy was born dead or with a terrible visible birth defect? All too often a maiden bitch will develop serious life-threatening complications and the child(ren) could be present to witness the death of the family pet. The lesson you started out to teach may end being very different, and considerably more traumatic one than you had planned. If you want your child to witness the miracle of birth, there are many excellent videos on the market today that describe this life-event without the potential trauma of a

live dog birth without adding to the pet over population problem and without putting the life of your companion bitch in jeopardy. Check with your local library's reference librarian for titles appropriate to the ages of your children.

"We want another dog JUST LIKE our Sandy." This is also a very common reason for breeding the family dog. The problem with this is that not only will you be producing another dog of the same breed (NO TWO DOGS ARE EVER EXACTLY ALIKE!), but a number of puppies that you will be responsible for finding good homes for or being responsible for their future fates at pounds, shelters or rescuers. If you want another dog of the same breed, with the same temperament and characteristics, why not call the breeder you purchased your current dog from? Perhaps the breeding has been repeated or the breeder has another puppy with the same or similar qualities you admire in your present dog. One of the advantages of owning a purebred dog is that the major characteristics..size, general build, coat type, color, temperament, etc..are set by generations of careful breeding and you can be pretty sure that any puppy you purchase, from a breeder, of that breed will, with the proper care and treatment, grow up to be pretty similar to the dog you already love and admire.

"I heard it is better, for the dog's temperament, to be bred one time and then altered." This is a complete and total Old Wives Tale that has no basis in fact! The truth is, the earlier your companion is altered, the better for it's overall health, temperament and development. Companion dogs that are altered before they reach sexual maturity. in most dogs that is at about 6 months of age, will grow up to be healthier, happier adult dogs and you will be a happier owner if you don't have to deal with the temperament, behavior and health issues that often occur in the intact dogs and bitches.

"We want another dog and thought that our present Golden would accept one of his/her own puppies better than bringing a strange puppy into the house." Another Old Wives Tale. Dogs, unlike human beings, do not maintain familial relationships. A male dog will not recognize a puppy as being one of his "children," and in the case of a bitch, once that puppy has grown, the mother-child relationship is no longer recognized by either mom dog or pup. In fact, I have known dams and pups who fought terribly with each other once the puppy had grown to adulthood. Your present dog has just as much chance of accepting a strange puppy as it does of accepting one that it helped to create. Most adult dogs get along very well with young puppies and it is at this time a bond should be established between puppy and other dog.