

What to Look for in a Reputable Breeder

Where to start? Go online! Check out the national ([AMCA](#)) and local clubs (ex. [MN](#) and [WI](#)) for lists of reputable breeders. Join Facebook groups. PM people whose malamutes you like and ask what their experiences have been with their breeder. Networking is your best friend!

About the Breeder		
Question	Why is this important?	Red Flags
How did you become interested in the breed?	A breeder's passion and overall mission shine through the stories they tell!	Do they focus on multiple breeds (i.e. more than 2)? Breeding takes time! It is a labor of love to delve through pedigree after pedigree, memorizing particular lines and dogs. The more breeds a person has, the less time they can spend honing their knowledge in any one.
How long have you been in the breed?	<p>Long-time breeders are invaluable resources. They tap into <i>years</i> of experience. They've thought of everything. They've seen it all.</p> <p>That said, a new breeder is not a red flag - everyone starts somewhere. Ask about their mentors. What lines did they chose to start their breeding program and why? Why did they start breeding? You should be able to gauge whether they've done their homework and are doing this for the right reasons.</p>	
<p>What is your philosophy behind breeding?</p> <p>What qualities do you breed for?</p>	<p>A reputable breeder cares about producing <i>quality</i> puppies. They should emphasis health, longevity, structure, temperament, and type.</p> <p>It's not that breeders don't care about color, markings, or certain type of coat - many will admit to a preference for a certain look - but these qualities cannot come before the aforementioned ones.</p>	<p>Do they breed specifically for 'rare' qualities such as colors, coat length, or size?</p> <p>If a breeder focuses on such superficial qualities, they might (and often do) end up ignoring the most important ones (health, longevity, structure, temperament, and type). This is not necessarily intentional, as no one knowingly wants to send unhealthy puppies into the world, but problems occur when one focuses on looks over substance.</p> <p>Furthermore, beware when 'rare' is used as a selling point. This is a gimmick used to sell puppies at inflated prices. Red is not rare. White is not rare. Long coats are simply a recessive trait that commonly occurs in litters - it is not preferred for functional reasons and is not a quality for which one should purposely breed.</p>
Do you show your dogs?	The breed standard describes the 'perfect' dog. Every detail should keep the dog's original function in mind. In malamutes, for example, dew laps (the flap of skin under	If a person does not (and never has) shown, then the likelihood that their dogs <i>don't</i> meet the standard is high. If they cannot follow these

	<p>the chin) keep the esophagus warm in arctic climates. Almond eyes (as opposed to round) protect eyes from snow, ice, and wind. Good shoulder angles give better reach so that every step on the trail <i>counts</i>. A gait that converges in the center means breaking less trail in the snow. The standard was written to protect and preserve these abilities in the breed. If a malamute cannot pull, what makes it a malamute?</p> <p>Dog shows - also called <i>conformation</i> - are a way to assess breeding stock by holding them up to this standard. Championships indicate that impartial observers have identified one's dog as 'conforming' particularly well to the standard.</p> <p>Not all reputable breeders show every dog. But have they shown in the past? Why did they stop? Check to see that their pedigrees have several AKC champions in the first two or three generations of the pedigree.</p>	<p>basic rules for the preservation and health of the breed, what else are they ignoring? Why are they breeding, if <i>not</i> to create that 'perfect' malamute?</p> <p>Do they proclaim 'champion pedigree,' but not offer a pedigree to view? 'Champion pedigree' simply means there are champions <i>somewhere</i> in the line. That means little. All breeders - good or bad - started from a relatively small pool of breeding stock, therefore most, if not all, purebred malamutes go back to champions <i>somewhere</i>. How <i>far back</i> are those well-known kennels or champion dogs? If it's more than 5 or 6 generations, that should be a red flag.</p>
<p>What other activities do you do with your dogs?</p> <p>What titles do your dogs have?</p>	<p>Malamutes are a working breed. They are highly intelligent and excel at performance and working activities such as sledding/carting, weight-pulling, back-packing, obedience, agility, and rally. Not all reputable breeders constantly work their dogs, but the breeder whose dogs have conformation <i>and</i> working titles is concentrating on producing the All Around Dog!</p> <p>Titles are located on either side of the dog's AKC name and indicate not only participation in these activities, but excellence. These are dogs that not only look the part, but <i>achieve</i>.</p>	<p>If a breeder does absolutely nothing with their dogs, how do they know that their dogs uphold the standard if they haven't tested them in the field for which they were originally bred? Furthermore, why have a working breed? This breed thrives on being given tasks to complete!</p>
<p>How often do you have litters?</p>	<p>A good breeder will have 1-2 litters (or fewer) planned per year. There may be a waiting list, as reputable breeders prefer to wait until there are at least a few homes lined up before breeding.</p>	<p>How many litters do they have in a year at the kennel? If a breeder's website says 'puppies always available' - run far and fast! To always have puppies available, these people must have MANY litters per year.</p>
<p>Are you a member of any clubs?</p>	<p>Reputable breeders will often be a member of the national breed club (Alaskan Malamute Club of America) and/or local breed club (Minnesota Malamute Club). These memberships say a lot about their dedication to good breeding practices. These clubs usually have strong standards for designating breeders as "reputable." They are exclusive - membership requires sponsors to vouch for the character and mission of the breeder - which shows that they have passed their compatriots' discerning tests.</p> <p>Additionally, who are their friends on Facebook? What groups are they a part of? Don't stalk... but do you recognize any of their friends from your research?</p>	<p>Clubs offer support, resources, and a sense of community to the breeding (and non-breeding) world. Why not be a part of it?</p> <p>Or have they <i>tried</i>, but the club turned them down because of their breeding practices? Clubs are very wary of potential backyard breeders and puppy mills infiltrating their ranks. If they are not members, there is probably a <i>reason</i>.</p> <p>When you check their Facebook friends and groups, do they have few recognizable reputable malamute friends? We are a small community,</p>

		and most people know each other.
<p>What is the average life expectancy of your dogs?</p> <p>Have you ever encountered _____ health problem?</p>	<p>It goes without saying, a longer life is an indicator of good health. If their dogs tend to live to 14 years old, they are definitely doing something right!</p> <p>Note: one or two cases of a health defect is not necessarily a red flag. Flukes happen. When you are in dogs as long as some breeders, you are bound to have the odd case crop up.</p>	<p>A breeder who claims to have never had <i>any</i> health problems is probably lying. No one has one-hundred percent perfect puppies every single time. Bloat happens. Cancer happens. A good breeder is honest.</p>

Parents

Question	Why is this important?	Red Flags
<p>What health checks have you done on the parents? What were the results?</p>	<p>REPUTABLE BREEDERS DO HEALTH CHECKS on their dogs before breeding them. This includes:</p> <p>OFA Certification (at a minimum: hips and eyes; also: cardiac, elbow, thyroid) → you can check the OFA website.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hips: Good and Excellent are preferred - Fair is not a death knell <i>IF</i> all dogs behind it have Gs and Es <p>DNA test for Polyneuropathy</p> <p>How to read hip number: AM-35124E34M-PI "AM": Alaskan Malamute "35124": His/her file number "E": Excellent "34": age in months when x-ray was taken "M": Male "PI": Permanently Identified with tattoo or microchip</p>	<p>One of the quickest ways to discern whether a breeder is reputable is to ask about health checks on their dogs. Do they do them? Puppy mills have one purpose: to make money. Health tests and x-rays are expensive and cut into revenue, so most won't do them. If someone cannot give you hard evidence of health checks... run!</p> <p>Some disreputable breeders have been known to fake or lie about OFA results, so it is best to go to the OFA website yourself to corroborate their certifications. All you need is the kennel name (and AKC registration name of the parents).</p>
<p>What can you tell me about the parents?</p>	<p>Reputable Breeders know their dogs intimately. There is a lot that you can glean about your future puppy's personality, health, and look from inspecting its parents. Breeders can tell you their dogs' personalities, energy levels, work drive, trainability, vocalness, and coat.</p>	<p>Disreputable breeders may know their dogs well, too, but what qualities do they focus on? Are they boasting about their massive weight or 'rare' color? Remember, an unbalanced (or total) emphasis on superficial qualities is a serious red flag!</p>
<p>Why did you choose the two parents for this breeding?</p>	<p>Reputable Breeders put much thought into every breeding. They should have a lot to say about what qualities the father and mother bring to the table. How will the father's strengths balance the mother's weaknesses, and vice versa? What do they expect to get out of this litter, considering the parents and what they've thrown in the past (if this isn't their first litter), and why? The amount of thought and care that they put into their selection can tell you a lot about the devotion of a breeder to the success of their breeding program.</p>	<p>Do they use sweeping, broad terms? "They are good/pretty/nice dogs." What does that mean? Are the boasting about those superficial qualities and little else?</p>

How old are the mother and father?	Reputable breeders don't breed their girls before 2 years of age, as they are not physically (or mentally) ready to bear puppies. No dog should be bred before they've had their health checks completed, and hips cannot be done until 2 years old anyway. This applies to both males and females.	Beware if either parent is bred before 2 years of age! Their health checks are not valid, yet, so they are breeding blind!
How many litters has the mother had?	Reputable breeders rarely breed females more than 2-4 times in their lifetime. Litters take a lot out of a female, and it is cruel to expect her to do more.	Girls should not have more than one litter per year and they should be retired from breeding somewhere between 7-8 years old.
Can I schedule a visit? If not, can I see pictures of the dogs and your facilities?	How do the parents look (if they have both on site)? Are they clean? Bright-eyed? Lithe and spry? Do they look like they could pull heavy loads? Do they look fit to run great distances (maybe not at the speed of Iditarod huskies, but at a steady, strong pace)? Look for clean facilities. Do the dogs have space to move? There have been cases of potential 'puppy buyers' attacking and killing breeders during home visits, so many breeders are understandably wary of inviting strangers over. If a breeder declines a home visit, they should be happy to send pictures or videos.	Are the dogs dirty? Ungroomed? Are they scrawny, small-boned, and lack definition to their bodies? Are they fat with stomachs that hang? Are their torsos overly long, resulting in a u-shaped topline? Are their coats dull (this can indicate underlying health issues)? Disreputable breeders rarely show pictures of their facilities, and there's usually a reason.

Puppies

Question	Why is this important?	Red Flags
How do you socialize your puppies?	Reputable breeders want their puppies to go into the world equipped with confidence and strong coping skills. To do this, they carefully and incrementally expose their puppies to different objects, experiences, people, animals, surfaces, and sounds.	Disreputable breeders may not focus on socializing their puppies. Perhaps the puppies are simply left in the kennel or a shed or barn. These puppies have a higher likelihood of shyness, low self-confidence, and full-out fearfulness.
Where do you keep the puppies?	Is the whelping box clean and cleared of waste? Puppies make a lot of messes, so their space may not be perfectly spotless at all times, but is there an obvious attempt to keep it clean? Puppies learn early on to avoid lying in their own waste when their mother (and then breeder) cleans up after them. This early conditioning will be crucial when houstraining begins.	Is the whelping box dirty? Puppies that cannot avoid lying in their own waste learn to accept such deplorable conditions. They are hard to houstrain because they don't differentiate between clean, waste-free spaces and potty areas.
At what age do you send puppies to their new homes?	Reputable Breeders don't send their pups to new homes before 8-10 weeks of age. Puppies learn integral social skills from their mother and siblings in those final weeks leading up to 8 weeks. One of the best things you can do for your future puppy is to be patient and let them gain that extra ounce of confidence and balance with their family.	Do they let puppies leave before 8 weeks of age? Temperamental issues are almost guaranteed when puppies leave their mother too soon. They may be overly shy or fearful, experience separation anxiety, and/or struggle with bite inhibition.

What kind of support do you offer puppy buyers once they go home?	Reputable breeders will be there for their puppy people if they have questions or problems. They will call or email to make sure that the transition and training is going well. They will offer suggestions. They will be particularly interested in any health problems that arise.	Breeders who perceive selling puppies as a business are like a retail store - all sales are final. Complaints are bad for business. Returns are a thorn in their side because it results in old stock coming back. There have been several cases of breeders going into radio silence once a puppy is sold (especially if later health problems are discovered).
How much does a puppy cost?	Do not ask this question right away! Reputable Breeders want to know that the quality of the puppy matters most to you. Often the price for a pet quality puppy from a show kennel is dramatically less than those who breed for profit.	Do they list methods of payment and prices on their website? This reveals how important getting that payment is to them. They also tend to overprice their dogs because of those 'rare' qualities mentioned above.
What requirements do you have of me as a puppy owner?	Many breeders require you to spay/neuter your puppy at a certain age, enter puppy classes / beginner obedience (at a minimum), submit your puppy's blood for DNA banking, get certain shots, and/or register through the AKC Limited Registration. These are all great, responsible requirements put in place to make your (and your puppy's) life better.	Do they require you to spay/neuter or register under AKC's Limited Registration? They should. Otherwise, the message that they are sending is they don't care if you breed the puppy. As mentioned above, breeding isn't something to be taken lightly.

Practices & Policies

Question	Why is this important?	Red Flags
If something were to happen, will you take the puppy back?	Reputable Breeders are not a burden on rescue! A Reputable Breeder ALWAYS takes back the dogs they produce no matter the age. Many Reputable Breeders are very supportive of rescue and help out with fostering, transporting, mentoring/education and information.	Are all puppies sold 'as is?' Are all sales final? No breeder should be okay with one of their dogs ending up in a shelter on death row or being a burden on rescue! Do they promise to replace the dog if there is a genetic problem, but then strongly imply that the dog's fate will be euthanasia? They do this to manipulate your emotions - no one wants the puppy they've raised and fallen in love with to be put to sleep!
Do you microchip?	A breeder who cares about their puppies will permanently identify their pups so they can be traced back to them should they become lost or end up in a shelter/breed rescue. They may even require that they be listed as the secondary contact under the microchip number.	Again, bad breeders don't care about their puppies once they leave. Microchipping also costs money.
Do you have any references (past puppy buyers)?	Reputable breeders want you to be as discerning a buyer as they are a seller. These puppies are their family and you, too, will become like family. It shows that you care if you ask to see references.	Google the breeder. Look for reviews. Check <u>Ripoff Report</u> .
Have you ever had a puppy	A good breeder will be honest. They will warn you about the difficulties of raising such a stubborn, intelligent, and	Bad breeders will typically answer this question by blaming everyone but themselves, especially if it's a health problem. If a puppy gets hip

returned? Why was it returned?	shedding breed as a malamute and tell you what happens if the proper training and day-to-day needs are not met.	dysplasia, <i>obviously</i> the owner did something to it (even if the parents have no hip scores and the owners did nothing wrong)!
Do you have any questions for me?	<p>Be prepared to answer a lot of questions about yourselves and your lifestyle. Breeders are entrusting you with one of the most important gifts imaginable. They want to make sure that both you and your puppy are a perfect match. A good breeder won't sell a puppy to anyone.</p> <p>Note: A good breeder will pick which puppy is yours. As much as you might adore the smallest puppy that crawls into your lap and falls asleep like an angel, the breeder knows through hours of observation that that puppy is a hellion when awake and might not be the best match. Some puppies show enormous drive and spirit, and must go to experienced dog owners, while others are big teddy bears that would be best suited for a less experienced owner. Trust the breeder to make the right decision. They want this match to be as successful as you.</p>	Do they ask any questions, or simply proceed to payment options and pricing? Again, the priority is clear, here.

Conclusion: A reputable breeder breeds for the betterment of the breed, not for making money. For the betterment of the breed means aligning with the AKC standard, using healthy breeding dogs with health checks, proving them in some area (show ring, working, performance events like obedience and agility), and trying to breed for that elusive 'perfect dog.'