

Dear Dr. Wise,

Question: I've had dogs all my life. To me there are two groups of dogs, 1) pedigree and 2) mixed breed. What is the difference between them and why does it seem like pedigreed dogs always get sick and need more medical care?

Answer: Your question appears quite simple but the answer is very complex. The word pedigree means the written record of a dog's descent of three or more generations. Purebred dogs are called pedigreed. Their sire and dam belong to the same breed and are themselves of unmixed descent since recognition of the breed.

The American Kennel Club (AKC), established September 17, 1984, is a nonprofit organization devoted to the advancement of purebred dogs. It maintains a registry of recognized breeds, adopts and enforces rules and regulations governing dog shows, obedience trials and field trials, and fosters and encourages interest in the health and welfare of purebred dogs.

The official publication of the AKC is the Complete Dog Book. It contains photographs, history and official standards of every breed admitted to AKC registration and selection, training, breeding, care and feeding information. The book can be found at your local library and most bookstores.

As you see, a purebred dog has had a very limited genetic background. Mixed breed dogs can be thought of as the survival of the fittest. Often it is the strongest and healthiest male and female which have produced offspring.

The quality of a purebred puppy-its health, temperament, intelligence and appearance-depends on how conscientiously the breeder selects a male and female for mating. The reason is the gene pool. Because purebreds have similar backgrounds, bad genetic qualities like skin problems and aggressiveness can show up more easily.

Breeders with no concern for maintaining breed standards will produce puppies with problems. This is particularly true for popular breeds when irresponsible breeders can't resist the temptation to have a lot of puppies to sell.

Most breeders take great care to maintain high standards. Their puppies make excellent pets. A buyer knows he is getting a healthy pet. He knows what to expect in the way of appearance, size and temperament. As the saying goes, "it's all in the breeding."

If you have questions about your pet, write to Dr. Wise, 201 S. Capitol Ave. Ste # 405, Indianapolis, IN 46225.