

Finding a Pembroke Welsh Corgi

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Is a Pembroke Welsh Corgi right for me? As a breed, Pembrokes generally make good family pets. They shed a lot, so if you don't like dog hair all over the house, do not get this breed. Pembrokes are very intelligent dogs who have been bred for herding. They need plenty of mental and physical exercise or they will start entertaining themselves, usually at the expense of your house or landscaping. They make great agility dogs. Being so smart, they can be trained very quickly, although are sometimes a bit stubborn in obeying.



Why should I do research before buying? Buying a puppy is like buying a car. You should research BEFORE you start shopping and fall in love at first sight with that "puppy in the window" who later turns out to be a lemon. Do a little research first and visit pups only AFTER you've determined that a certain litter, pup, or even the breed is the best choice for you. People fall in love with cute faces, buy without asking the right questions or despite getting the wrong answers, and often regret it later.

The RIGHT puppy is just as cute as the WRONG puppy:

You'll get a better lifetime friend instead of an expensive heartbreak.

What you want is a puppy who is mentally and physically sound: well socialized, parents tested clear of genetic problems. Improper socialization is often due to a pup being taken from its littermates and dam before the age of 8 weeks and not being introduced to a variety of people, objects, and noises by a breeder. They can be fearful or aggressive with other dogs, strangers, or in strange situations. Unsocialized pups often difficult to train out of puppy biting of hands. Pups should not leave their mother and littermates before the age of 8 weeks, preferably not before 10 wks.

Where is the best place to find such a puppy? There are basically 3 groups which sell puppies:

Reputable breeders. The best place to get a healthy, well socialized puppy is from a reputable breeder. Breeders that show and title their dogs are the category of breeders to start your search with. Titles are earned by competing in conformation, agility, obedience, and other performance events to show their dog is of good quality physically and mentally. In general, these breeders screen their dogs for genetic defects that their breed is known to have and socialize their pups properly. However, do note that not all show breeders are reputable breeders. You should determine this by asking questions. Reputable breeders are often hard to find. They rarely advertise in the newspaper or on internet sites. Most of their buyers come from word of mouth or from previous puppy buyers. The best place to find good breeders is to go to dog shows and meet breeders, or go to the websites of various Pembroke Welsh Corgi clubs which have breeder lists. Often a reputable breeder will have a web page, but it will showcase their dogs and pups, and not advertise that they have pups for sale.

Pet stores/puppy mills. Pups from pet stores usually cost \$200-300 more than from reputable or backyard breeders, usually are improperly socialized, are not screened for genetic problems, and often have been exposed to deadly diseases such as Parvo. Pet store pups also have often been bred in puppy mills where the sire and dam live in sordid conditions with little care or human touch. Occasionally they come from backyard breeders. Buying or "rescuing" a pup by purchasing it from a pet store only encourages the pet store to buy more of that breed since they were successful in selling one to you. This also encourages their puppy mill suppliers to breed more. Puppy mills (often called commercial kennels) typically directly sell pups at a lower price. However, puppies from mills come with no socialization, usually no shots, often are diseased, and have had no screening for genetic problems. Puppy mills often advertise in dog magazines, on the internet ("We have over 20 breeds to choose from"), in the newspaper, or yellow pages.

Backyard breeders. Pups from backyard breeders are usually better socialized than pet store/puppy mill pups as they're typically exposed to most typical household adventures that a puppy mill puppy would never have seen. However, they are normally sold before they receive adequate socialization from their dam and littermates. Backyard bred dogs are rarely screened for genetic problems and rarely come with a guarantee against future problems. Many newspaper and internet ads for a single litter/breed are from backyard breeders.

Adult vs Puppy? Many people are quite busy and do not have the time to properly train a young puppy. Often an older pup or dog is the best choice. You may find a retired champion, an older puppy that didn't quite fulfill its original show potential, a dog that was returned to the breeder as his owners had to give it up, or a rescue. Rescue dogs are generally well tested for behavior problems. If they're minor, rescue people will tell you about them and see if they fit your circumstances (e.g. no children or other dogs in the house). They will not place dogs that they know have had severe behavior problems such as biting people. Go to our Rescue page to find out more.

Genetic Problems in Pembrokes. Pembrokes, as all breeds (including mixed breeds and wild canines) can have some genetic health problems. Fortunately, Pembrokes do not have many. Hip dysplasia, and various eye problems are the main genetic problems known in the Pembroke. There are other genetic problems that do occur in Pembrokes, but these are not problems common enough to be screened for unless it is known in a certain bloodline. If a breeder says a dog (sire, dam, or pups) is "clear" of a certain problem, always ask for the original paperwork as proof. If the sire is not owned by the breeder, the breeder will probably only have a copy of his paperwork. Breeders who are legitimate about their claims will understand and even greatly appreciate you asking. It shows you really care about the pup you're looking for and have done your homework. If a breeder is hesitant or does not want to show you proof, beware!

Hip Dysplasia (HD). Hip Dysplasia is where the femoral head doesn't fit into the hip socket properly, and that can cripple a puppy when it's only a few months old at its worst. Despite the claims of some breeders ("HD is a problem in big dogs only...oh my lines don't have that problem...it doesn't affect Pembrokes much") HD is a problem in the breed. The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) found that 17.2% of Pembrokes who had x-rays submitted for evaluation had hip dysplasia (based on data collected through 2001).

What's an OFA rating? OFA rates dog hips as normal, excellent, good, fair, borderline, mild, moderate or severe. Normal (a rating that was only given when OFA first started rating hips),

excellent, good, and fair are passing ratings and the dog is given an OFA number if the dog is older than 2 yrs (age at which hips are quite stable). The other ratings are indicative of hip problems. A "Preliminary" (sometimes called "Prelim") rating can be given before 2 yrs of age, sometimes as early as 6 months, but usually not until the dog is 1 yr. "Preliminary" means that there is a chance that the rating may still change (for the better or worse) by the time the dog reaches 2 yrs of age. See the OFA website for more detailed information.

What's a PennHip rating? It is not a direct rating of hip dysplasia like an OFA. PennHip instead rates hip joint laxity which is a primary indicator of hip dysplasia. Ratings range between 0.0 and 1.0, with low numbers being better. PennHip recommends breeding dogs with ratings better than the median rating (0.65 as of 8/02) of all Pembrokes PennHipped to date (199 as of 8/02). Note that this median rating is different for different breeds. See the PennHip website for more detailed information.

At the very least, the sire and dam of pups you're looking at should have an OFA of Fair, Good, or Excellent or PennHip rating below 0.65. However, since hip dysplasia mainly results from polygenetic problems with many different aspects of the hip and leg structure, it's possible that a pup could have bad hips even if he had 5 generations of ancestors that were clear of problems. This is why a purchase contract should guarantee hips. No matter how hard a reputable breeder tries, sometimes unexpected genes pop up. However, the more generations of clear hips in a pedigree, the less likely the pup will have problems. Note that extreme exercise (very long walks, ball throwing until the pup can't chase anymore) as a puppy can wear growing joints down from genetically destined good hips into dysplastic hips.

A breeder should show you at least a 3 generation pedigree of the litter showing all OFA and PennHip hip ratings available. If they do not have this information, or you would like to research the information yourself, ask for a copy of the pedigree and look up the individuals in the pedigree on OFA (go to Search Online).

If the dog is not in the database (PennHip ratings will not be in the OFA database), you can assume one of several reasons.

1-The dog lived in another country where they do not use our US hip registries. Dogs from other countries are determined by indicators such as a foreign title (Eng. Ch), or by asking the breeder. Unfortunately not all countries check for hip dysplasia, or their databases are unavailable.

2-The dog was bred long ago when people didn't check for hip problems. Dogs way back in the pedigree (4-5th generation) might not have an OFA rating as it was not as common before 1987 to check for hip dysplasia. It is common now.

3-The dog was under 2 yrs of age. You can ask the breeder the age of the sire or dam to see if it was too young to have an OFA number, but even then, the dog should have a passing Preliminary Hip Report with a rating. On occasion, the hip rating may not be in the online OFA database yet if it was recently submitted, and sometimes typos do occur (use only one of the words in a dog's registered name and use another if you cannot find a dog via the first try name). If a breeder says this is the case, you may call OFA to find the rating. However, if the breeder says "OFA lost the x-ray," this is often an indication of the dog not passing.

4-The breeder didn't care what the dog's hips were like, keep away from this breeder!

5-The dog was dysplastic and most definitely don't buy a pup here!

Eye Disorders. Eye exams can be done at any age. Since some eye disorders can appear at any age, parents of the pups should have CERF or ACVO Normal rated eyes during a checkup with an ophthalmologist within a year of the litter being bred. It's good to get a guarantee in your contract against eye disorders that severely affect a pup's vision. However, most eye disorders do not affect quality of life.

Persistent Pupillary Membranes (PPM's) are very common in Pembrokes and in small numbers do not affect a dog's vision and aren't a worry. However, when found in large numbers or in sheets, they can obscure vision and are not good to have in a pet. PPM's are blood vessel remnants in the anterior chamber of the eye (the liquid-filled area in front of the iris and pupil) which do not degenerate as normal before the dog is 3 months old. Pembrokes often have some which are retained after this age, but most usually disappear before the dog is 1 year old. Retinal folds fall into the same category as PPM's. Juvenile cataracts and retinal problems are quality of life conditions. Some bottle fed pups have been found to develop non-progressive cataracts induced by the ingredients of the formula, but most breeders now avoid these formulas.

More information on inherited eye diseases in Corgis and other breeds can be found from CERF or EyeVet.

Bleeding disorders. Bleeding disorders are rare in Pembrokes, but do occasionally occur. Von Willebrand's Disease (vWD) is a blood clotting disorder that occurs in a few breeds in different magnitudes. Pembrokes can have a mild form of vWD which rarely causes life threatening symptoms. A DNA test is available to determine if a dog is affected (will show signs of the disease), a carrier (will not have the disease but carries the gene), or is clear of this disease, but will not test against other bleeding disorders. It has been often found that the few Pembrokes that have had life threatening bleeding problems have tested clear of vWD, so there are currently some unknown factors.

Pet vs Show Quality. There is usually very little difference between pet and show quality dogs. Most certainly not in the heart and soul of a dog, which is the most important part. You might ask what difference there is in the heart of a Best in Show winning dog and someone else's beloved couch potato? There is none. Sometimes the dividing line between pet and show quality dogs is the shape of a dog's ears, a snip of white going beyond the dog's withers, or a topline that isn't perfectly level. A breeder breeds for show quality, but the nature of genetics rarely provides all the right bits and pieces in the same dog. It is best for maintaining the quality of the breed that these dogs do not pass their genes on, so they are placed in homes where they will be neutered. While neutered corgis cannot be shown in the conformation ring, they can participate in any of the AKC performance events (obedience, agility, tracking, herding trials) so long as they have been registered. Purebred Rescue corgis can obtain an ILP number from AKC and also participate in any AKC performance event. Go to the AKC website for more information on ILPing.

Temperament. "Outlook bold, but kindly. Never shy nor vicious." Temperaments are amazingly influenced by genetics. If possible, meet the sire, dam, and relatives of the litter. Are they good around other dogs? Are they friendly with strangers? Note that the dam might behave differently than normal due to her maternal instincts for protecting her pups from strangers. Do the pups shy away

when you approach? Ask the breeder about their temperaments. Often the sire of the litter isn't owned by the dam's owner, so it may be harder to determine his temperament.

Pembrokes range in temperament from soft to dominant and hard. Soft dogs need a gentle hand. Hard/dominant dogs need a very firm (but not physical) hand to let them know that humans are the alpha in the family, or they can become snappy and controlling. It's best to avoid hard/dominant dogs if you have little experience with dogs and dog behavior. The best temperament is in between.

From there, what kind of playmate do you want? Some Pembrokes make good couch potatoes, some are busy bees that want to do things all the time. Which fits your lifestyle best? Ask the breeder which type the pup might be best based on its parents and the pups themselves. Also find a book on puppy picking for clues on which individual pup in a litter is likely to be the best if the breeder gives you a choice of pups. Often a good breeder will pick a puppy for you as they can best match an individual pup's temperament with your lifestyle. It's best to pass on the litter if the bloodline doesn't suit your lifestyle.

Fluffies. A fluffy is a recessive coat type in Pembrokes which is like a sheltie coat. This coat type should not be shown in the conformation ring so breeders place them in pet homes. Fluffies are extremely cute, but they do need more grooming.

Contracts. Most reputable breeders require a contract. Contracts are to protect the puppy from you if you turn out to be a less than ideal home, and to protect you if the puppy turns out to have a previously unknown physical problem.

What should be in a pet contract? The main points of a good contract:

- * -Money back or replacement for a pup which has severe problems such as hip dysplasia or severe eye problems. Usually this guarantees a dog until 2 years of age when most severe Pembroke congenital problems will have shown up. One can't expect the breeder to guarantee through the dog's old age when normal geriatric problems start showing up. All reputable breeders should have this guarantee, as no matter how many generations of good hips and eyes are behind a pup, bad genes can hide generations then suddenly cause problems. Avoid contracts that guarantee to replace a pup only if you return a dog to the breeder. Would you do that to the pet you've loved? No. A contract should either require a refund or offer a new pup without you having to give up the dog.

- * Males should be neutered at 6-8 months and females should be spayed at 6 months to prevent their first season which can occur at 7-10 months. This protects the dog from increased risks of cancer when hormones rapidly increase before the teenage months or during the first season, lessens the risk of marking or other unwanted hormone related behaviors, and prevents accidental breedings. Show breeders breed for the betterment of the breed; i.e. only the highest quality animals should be passing their genes on. Pet quality dogs should not be bred as they will pass on the traits that determined they were pet quality.

- * Dog shall not be bred, and monetary fines are usually specified if the dog is bred. This is just a backup clause to the above.

- * Dog is registerable with AKC (typically limited registration) and the pedigree is correct. This protects the buyer against false claims by breeder.

* The dog must be returned to breeder if the buyer cannot keep it so the breeder can place the dog in a good new home. No fault put on anyone. Sometimes people lose their jobs, get severe dog allergies, divorce, etc. This protects the dog against being taken to the pound where it may be euthanized, or given to a neighbor or relative who might care less about the dog and won't take good care of it.

* Dog can be returned within X days (usually 2-7) for full refund (but buyer had best not run the dog over within those X days, nor take it to a park where it will pick up Parvo and die). This protects dog and buyers in case a family member turns out to be allergic, the spousal unit decides they hate the dog, an initial vet checkup finds a problem, or a buyer just finds that a puppy is just too much to handle.

* Dog is in good health at time of sale and buyer must take to a vet for a full checkup (usually within 1-3 days). Protects buyer from undiscovered problems, and getting a sick pup. Many breeders give their own shots so might inadvertently miss a problem that a vet might find in a full exam. Many breeders prefer to give their own shots so pups aren't exposed to deadly diseases like Parvo at a vet's office.