

TEST FOR PROSPECTIVE GOLDEN RETRIEVER BREEDERS

Before you fall in love with the first adorable Golden face you see, take the time to ask the following 31 questions to all prospective breeders. You may not find a breeder who fits 100% of these criteria, but if you receive more than two negative responses, you may want to consider another breeder. And, do start early! Responsible breeders can have waiting lists from a few months to several years. Remember, the right four-footed addition to your family is worth waiting for!

1. Where did you find out about this Golden breeder?

Responsible breeders will breed only when they have a waiting list of puppy buyers. They usually don't find it necessary to advertise in newspapers. The Golden Retriever Club of America maintains a Puppy Referral Network at www.grca.org/puppy/puppy.htm for the entire U.S. They have a national information line at (800) 861-5155. And, volunteer, Frank Andrews will answer your questions over the phone at (850) 877-4817.

2. Is there longevity in the lines behind both Golden parents?

Surveys show that cancer is the leading cause of death in the breed, Hemangiosarcoma and Lymphosarcoma leading the list. This has brought the Golden's average lifespan down to 10½ years. While we believe they should be long-lived (12-16 years) and healthy and active during most of this time, no screening test for cancer is currently available. One approach is for breeders to select bitches from lines where more than 75% of the dogs in the pedigree lived to at least 11 (longer than the golden average). Breeders can also research the cause of death on as many dogs in the pedigree *and their siblings* as possible, and additionally breed to older males who have already reached the average age. Unfortunately, this is seldom done as many want to breed to today's top-winning dogs. Rather, we need to be breeding to their sires.

3. Do the parents (sire and dam) have hip clearances from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (www.offa.org) or PennHip (www.pennhip.org) ?

Ask to see the certificates. "My vet okayed the x-ray" is not a valid clearance.

4. Do the parents (sire and dam) have elbow clearances from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA)?

Ask to see the certificates. "My vet okayed the x-ray" is not a valid clearance.

5. Do the parents have current Canine Eye Research Foundation (www.eyevet.org) clearances?

This must be performed every year. Ask to see the certificates.

6. Do the Golden parents have a veterinarian's clearance preferably with ultrasound by a canine board certified cardiologist, on the hearts of both parents?

You can find a list of board-certified veterinary cardiologists here (www.acvim.org/Specialist/Search.aspx). The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals has opened a heart registry so some breeders may provide you with OFA certification. Ask to see the certificates.

7. Do both Golden parents have current thyroid clearances?

Thyroid testing is done at Cornell and the University of Michigan. The OFA now provides a registry for thyroid screening. Screening for thyroid abnormalities should be done annually from ages one to six.

8. Are both Golden parents free of epilepsy?

Idiopathic epilepsy, which is hard to diagnose, results in recurrent seizures which have no apparent environmental or physiological cause. Inherited epilepsy may appear between one and three years of age or as late as age five. Currently, there remains no registry or certification for epilepsy-free dogs.

9. Are both Golden parents free of allergies, hot spots, skin problems, or chronic ear infections?

10. Are both Golden parents free from esophageal (swallowing) disorders?

11. Do all four grandparents, siblings of the parents and other pups they may have produced have these clearances?

And, all they all free from the above disorders? A responsible breeder will keep track of these statistics and honestly discuss any problems that have occurred in the lines and what has been done to prevent them from recurring.

12. Are both Golden parents at least two years old?

OFA hip clearances cannot be obtained before that age. PennHip determines hip conditions at an earlier age.

13. How often is the Golden dam bred?

Breeding every heat cycle IS TOO OFTEN and may indicate that profit is the primary motive for the breeding.

14. Is this Golden breeder willing to provide you with references and telephone numbers of other people who have purchased puppies from him/her?

15. Will the Golden puppy have a limited registration (which means if the dog is bred, the puppies cannot be AKC registered) with a mandatory spay/neuter contract?

A breeder who cares enough about the breed to insist on these is probably a responsible breeder.

16. On what basis was the Golden sire chosen?

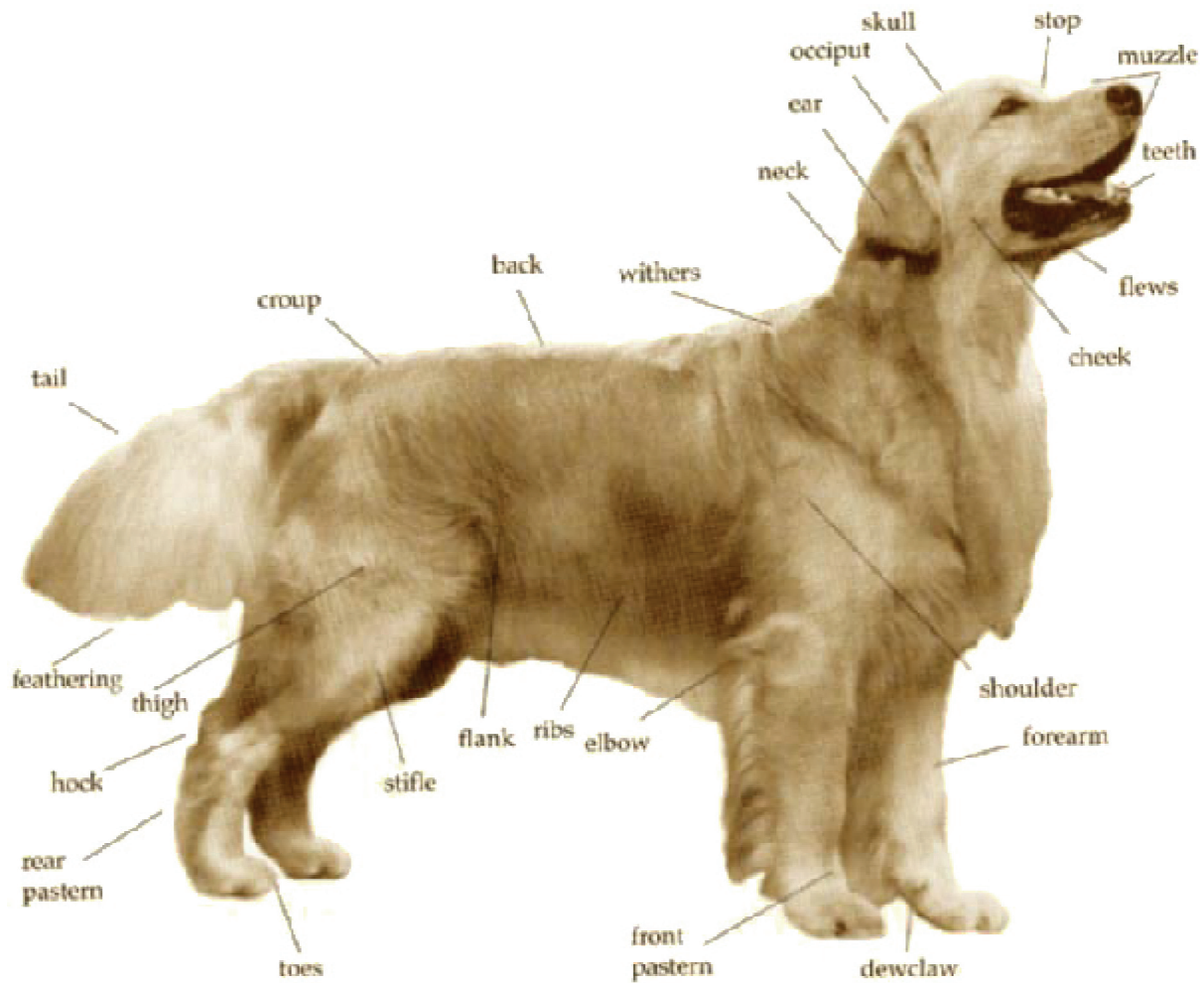
If the answer is "because he lives right down the street" or "because he is really sweet," it may be that sufficient thought was not put into the breeding.

17. Will this Golden breeder take the dog back at any time, for any reason, if you cannot keep it?

This is the hallmark of responsible breeding (and the quickest, best way to make rescue obsolete).

18. Will this Golden breeder be available for the life of the dog to answer any questions you might have? Is this someone you would feel comfortable asking any type of question?

Keep in mind that you are entering into a long relationship. If you feel intimidated or pressured, keep looking! It's worth the effort.



19. Is this Golden breeder knowledgeable about the breed standard?

For instance, be wary of breeders who tell you that they breed the larger variety of Golden Retrievers. Bigger is definitely not better. Males should be 23 to 24 inches in height at the withers and females 21½ to 22½ inches. The length from breastbone to the point of buttocks should be slightly greater than the height at withers in the ratio of 12:11. Weight for dogs is 65 to 75 pounds and for bitches it is 55 to 65 pounds. Information on the U.S. and English standards can be found here (landofpuregold.com/please-gstandards.htm).

20. Is this Golden breeder involved in competition with their Golden Retrievers (field, obedience, or conformation)?

21. Are there many titled Goldens (CH, OTCH, CD, JH, WC... before or after the names) in the first two generations?

The term "champion lines" means nothing if those titles are back three or more generations or there are only one or two in the whole pedigree.

22. Are the Golden puppy's sire and dam available for you to meet?

If the Golden sire is unavailable, are you able to call his owners or people who have his puppies to ask about temperament or health problems? You should also be provided with pictures or videos.

23. Have the Golden puppies been raised in the home — not in a kennel, barn or the back yard?

24. Is this Golden breeder knowledgeable about raising puppies, critical neonatal periods, proper socialization techniques?

Puppies that are raised without high exposure to gentle handling, human contact and a wide variety of noises and experiences OR are removed from their dam or litter mates before at least 7 weeks may exhibit a wide variety of behavioral problems! Temperament, a genetic trait carried over from the parents, still needs development from the early beginnings of a puppy's life. The breeder should provide extensive socialization and human interaction to the puppies in the litter.

25. Does this Golden breeder provide a 3 to 5 generation pedigree, copies of all clearances, the guarantee, health records and assorted materials to help you with feeding, training and housebreaking?

26. Have the puppies' temperaments been evaluated and can this Golden breeder guide you to the puppy that will best suit your lifestyle?

A very shy puppy will not do well in a noisy household with small children, just as a very dominant puppy won't flourish in a sedate, senior citizen household. A caring breeder will know the puppies and be able to show you how to test them so that good matches can be made.

27. Do these Golden puppies seem healthy, with no discharge from eyes or nose, no loose stools, no foul smelling ears? Are their coats soft, full and clean? Do they have plenty of energy when awake, yet calm down easily when gently stroked?

28. Do these Golden puppies have their first shots and have they been wormed?

29. Does this Golden breeder have only 1 or at most 2 breeds of dogs and only 1 litter at a time?

If there are several breeds of dogs, chances are the breeder cannot devote the time it takes to become really knowledgeable about the breed. If there is more than one litter at a time, it is very difficult to give the puppies the attention they need and may indicate that the primary purpose for breeding is profit, rather than a sincere desire to sustain and improve the breed.

30. Does the breeder provide a health guarantee?

31. Does this breeder belong to the Golden Retriever Club of America and/or a local Golden Retriever club and has he/she signed a breeders' "Code of Ethics"?
