

SHOULD I BREED MY VIZSLA?

by the Central Wisconsin Vizsla Club

Many people, sometime during the life of their dog, look at it and think, "Wouldn't it be nice to have a litter of puppies from her (or him)?" After all, to you, your dog is the sweetest, or nicest, or smartest, or the best hunter. Hopefully, to you, your dog is all of these. But there are other considerations when deciding whether or not to breed.

If you are lucky, you have purchased your dog from a reputable breeder who may well have made the decision for you by selling it on a spay/neuter or limited registration contract. If your dog is on a limited registration, you must get the consent of your breeder to lift that registration before you can breed and register the puppies. Your breeder, hopefully, has years of experience with Vizslas and can give you an educated opinion about whether your dog should be bred. If that is not the case, you must take an unbiased look at your dog and make that decision.

First, let's dispel a couple of common fallacies:

- It is NOT better for your female to have a litter of puppies before she is spayed, nor does she need to experience the birth of puppies to make her "complete."
- Having a litter of puppies will NOT calm your dog down. If your reason for having a litter of puppies is to calm your dog down because she is too "hyper"—think again. All you will do is create puppies that are excitable (like your dog), and are difficult for other people to handle.
- Breeding your male before you neuter him will definitely NOT make him calmer. It will likely have the opposite effect.
- Spaying and neutering does NOT make your dog fat and less active—over feeding and lack of exercise does that.

Fallacies dispelled, what are your reasons for wanting to have a litter of puppies and what are you willing to sacrifice? Do you think it is something your kids should experience? What are you teaching them by having a litter for that reason? Not responsible breeding practices! Do you want a puppy from your dog because you want a dog just like the one you have? Chances are slim you will get one just like Rover. After all, it takes two to tango, and both contribute to the makeup of the puppies you are going to create.

OK, you want one, your brother wants one and maybe a friend wants one. Three gone. What are you going to do with the other five? Worse, what if you happen to have a litter of 11 or 12? Are you willing to keep them until you can find appropriate homes? That may mean until they are well beyond 7 or 8 weeks—maybe 7 or 8 months or longer. Are you willing to spend hours with people to make sure they understand what Vizslas are like and that they are the right people for your puppies? Can you tell people “No” if they are not an appropriate home? Are you willing and able to counsel, support and provide guidance to the people who get puppies from you throughout the life of the puppy? Are you willing and able to take the puppies back throughout their lives if the placement does not work out? What if something happens several years from now and the people can no longer keep the dog? Responsible breeders accept responsibility for their puppies for their entire lives. If you are not willing to spend the time interviewing people to make sure they can provide a suitable home or take dogs back if needed, you should not consider breeding. If you do breed and don't spend the time to find good homes, are you willing to have someone from breed rescue call you in a couple years? They will likely tell you that one of your dogs is in rescue, has been abused, and is in need of a home? How will you feel if that happens?

If you own a female, are you willing to sacrifice her life if something goes wrong? Are you willing to lose money to have a litter of puppies? If there are problems with the delivery, veterinary bills can literally run up into the thousands of dollars. A seemingly healthy female may have a narrow birth canal or puppies may be breach or countless other problems can come up. Are you willing and able to deal with that? If your female cannot feed the pups, are you willing and able to get up every two hours to feed them for 2-3 weeks, and every four hours for the following two weeks?

If you own the male, can you house a female while the breeding takes place? This is usually a minimum of two weeks. Can you insure her safety during that time? Do you know what to do if the female is unwilling to be bred? This can be a dangerous situation for your male as well. Are you able to possibly take off work to pick up the bitch from the airport and again to ship her back to the breeder? Or are you willing to have the breeder come to your home, possibly staying overnight depending on the distance, to drop the bitch off and again to pick her up? Are you willing to take the bitch for progesterone tests if requested, and to pay for those tests at the time they are performed (to be reimbursed by the breeder later). Sometimes breeders have demands that may seem unreasonable to you. How will you deal with those?

If you are still interested in breeding, it is time to get to the considerations of whether your dog is “breedable”. You need to look at all of the following:

TEMPERAMENT – What is your dog’s personality like? Is he/she great with your family? What about strangers? Is your Vizsla skittish around new people? If your answer is yes, you need to consider if this is the type of personality you want to pass on to puppies. Has it ever growled? Has it ever snapped? Bitten? Can you take its food dish away without fear or take anything, no matter what, out of its mouth without worry? Is your Vizsla aggressive toward other dogs? How trainable is your dog? Does it take easily to training and learning new things? Does it test you and test you and test you once it knows what it is suppose to do? Consider all of these things carefully before deciding to breed. Good temperament should be #1 on your list of importance.

HEALTH – Is your dog healthy? Has it ever had problems with allergies or immune system problems? Have you had its hips and elbows x-rayed and OFA rated? Have you had its eyes CERF’d? Have you had its thyroid checked? Von Willebrands factor checked? It’s heart checked? If you don’t know what we are referring to here, you have some research to do before you even consider breeding. Are you willing to invest the money necessary to have these health checks done prior to breeding? All are important.

Do you know what health issues are behind your dog? Familiarize yourself with your dog’s pedigree and learn about it. Are there any dogs that had epilepsy or produced it? What are the OFA ratings on your dog’s ancestors—not just the sire and dam, go as far back as you can. What have those ancestors produced in terms of health problems? What about your dog’s littermates? Are they healthy? If your dog has OFA good hips, but the rest of the litter is dysplastic, for example, you probably should not consider breeding. Once you know about your dog, be prepared to find out the same things about the dog you may use as a mate.

CONFORMATION – Does your dog conform to the AKC standard for Vizslas? Does it have any disqualifying faults? Too much white, a black nose, yellow eyes? What are the strengths and weaknesses in your dog? Is it cowhocked? Does it toe in or out? Does it lack depth of chest? Are its eyes light? Is your dog too small? Too big? Does your dog move correctly? If you don’t know the standard, go to the library and get an AKC breed book, visit www.akc.org or the www.vca.org and read the breed standard. If you don’t understand what you are reading, take your dog to your local Vizsla club or all breed club, along with the standard, and ask someone who is familiar with AKC standards to help you interpret it and apply it to your dog.

FUNCTIONALITY – Is your dog able to do what it was bred for? In the case of a Vizsla, even if you are not a hunter, you should confirm that your dog has hunting instinct. That was what the Vizsla was created for centuries ago, and you should try to maintain that instinct in the puppies you are producing.

TITLES – Titles do not make a dog breedable, nor does a lack of titles mean a dog should not be bred. Titles are a testament to your dog's conformation, in the case of a show championship, its trainability, and its instincts. For the puppy buyer a distance away who has not had an opportunity to see your dog, titles give them an indication of where your dog's strengths might be.

If you are still set on breeding your dog, you must begin looking for a mate. In the case of a male, the females come to you, not vice versa. You must get your dog out where it will be seen. That may mean joining and participating in your local Vizsla club, maybe running in hunt tests or competing in another venue that interests you. You can't expect people to knock on your door if they don't know about your dog.

Whether you have a male or a female, you must choose your Vizsla's mate carefully. Consider your Vizsla's strengths and weaknesses in all areas (temperament, health, conformation, and functionality), and try to choose a mate that will enhance the strengths and improve on the weaknesses.

Whether you have the stud dog or the bitch, a litter of puppies requires a lot of advanced planning and preparation. It is not an endeavor that should be taken lightly. Like everything, there is a right way and a wrong way to produce and care for a litter of puppies. We hope, if you decide to have a litter, you decide to do it the right way.