

## Oodles of doodles

By Naomi Kane, ARTICLE, [LIFESTYLE](#)

The history of most of today's purebred dogs starts something along the lines of Lord Somethingorother, local gamekeepers or huntsmen, needed a dog that could catch rats all day long, herd livestock, guard something special, pull heavy loads or hunt over some special terrain, so they bred local dogs to imported dogs to achieve this special purpose and created the Wirehaired Specialhund. The Wirehaired Specialhund remained popular, even when its original job became obsolete, because of its wonderful temperament, adaptability etc., etc.

We have purebred dogs today because a fancier or a few fanciers thought a dog with those characteristics would be useful or just nice to have around. So what is wrong with experimenting, why not try new things and what exactly is the difference between the Bullmastiff and the labradoodle, aside from the silly name?

### **Qualities of a purebred**

A purebred dog comes from the mating of two registered purebred dogs of the same breed. The resulting puppies can be reliably predicted to have the physical and mental characteristics of their ancestors. This means that if you breed a Poodle to a Poodle you will reliably get Poodle puppies that will grow up to look and act like Poodles.

Purebred dogs have a standard of excellence – a written description of the breed's ideal look and characteristics. Generations of purebred dogs have been carefully screened and selected so that only the healthiest, best tempered and best looking are used to produce more puppies of that breed. Purebred dogs are registered and have pedigrees that can be traced back in some cases to the beginning of the breed. The qualities of the dogs that go into the pedigrees are known and recorded so that faults and good qualities can be tracked. Breeders and breed clubs work tirelessly to maintain high ethical standards and keep the look, temperament and health of each breed.

A distressing number of people think that simply putting a name to a mixed-breed puppy makes it a real breed. Jugs, puggles, schweatens, cockapoos and every doodle imaginable are populating parks and handbags around the world. Clearly, many people either don't know or don't care that if you mate a Pug to a Beagle you have a litter of mixed-breed dogs, even if you call them "Puggles." Misinformation and rumour touted as fact; the all-too-human propensity for falling in love with the first cute puppy you see; and a real lack of awareness on the part of purebred dog breeders and organizations has resulted in a worldwide frenzy of crossbreeding anything to everything. Crossbred puppies with goofy names are advertised as "designer breeds" and sell for exorbitant prices while carefully bred, health-tested purebred puppies from responsible breeders are overlooked.

### **Characteristics of crossbreeds**

How many times have we heard that mutts are healthier than purebreds, mutts have hybrid vigour or that Poodle crosses are hypoallergenic? The myth is that if you breed

two dogs of different breeds, you can accurately predict the exact attributes the ensuing puppies will display, and that these “designer dogs” will be healthier than purebreds due to “hybrid vigour.” The truth is that crossing two different breeds will result in some puppies looking like each parent and some puppies resembling a mix of the two – maybe. Even though the breeders of these pups say they can predict things like coat type, colour, temperament and size, they cannot. The only things that can be predicted for sure are that the puppies will be awfully cute because puppies always are, and that many of these dogs will end up in shelters because they got bigger and weren’t hypoallergenic as advertised.

Doodle dogs are deliberate crossbreeds and their producers have no intention of developing a breed; they simply continue to crossbreed and sell puppies. Doodle producers do some fancy double-talk touting their puppies as special and better because they are crossbred. If you have a weak heart or high blood pressure, skip the next section or at least make sure you’re sitting down. The North American Cockapoo Registry – yes, they call themselves a registry; that isn’t the shocking part – says, “A true cockapoo is ONLY a purposeful, planned crossing of a purebred cocker spaniel with a purebred poodle. Without a traceable background anything cute and fuzzy could be (and has been) passed off as a “cockapoo” by unscrupulous people.” If they weren’t so successful it would be funny, but instead of seeing the idiocy and finding a nice Poodle or Cocker Spaniel with a real, traceable background, people read that and buy a cockapoo.

Most labradoodle merchants offer labradoodles and Australian labradoodles. The difference between them is that Australian labradoodles are supposed to be a purebred developed from infusions of a few other breeds into the original Poodle/Lab crosses. According to some web sites, there is a move to seek eventual breed recognition. So now they have it both ways: A mixed breed is better, except when it isn’t.

### **Hybrid vigour**

Millions of dollars have been put into health research and testing by responsible breeders of purebred dogs. Records and databases going back generations make health issues in purebred dogs visible; therefore it looks like purebred dogs have lots of health issues. There is no database or health record for mixed-breed dogs, but it is evident from observation that they have health problems.

Crossbreed producers claim to be breeding “top quality” dogs and fixing health problems by producing puppies with “hybrid vigour.” To begin with, no reputable breeder would knowingly sell a puppy to somebody planning to produce mixes, so the breeding stock must come from other, less-than-reputable sources. The quality and health of their bloodlines is suspect to say the least.

Hybrid vigour refers to the mating of two different species within a family of animals, such as a lion and a tiger, a horse and a donkey, or a dog and a wolf. Since crossbreed dogs are simply a mating of a dog and another dog, the genes for health problems have an excellent chance of doubling up and expressing themselves in the offspring. Claims of super health are nonsense; veterinarians see as many problems in “designer dogs” as in purebreds. Since most doodle producers do no health testing and their breeding stock is

unlikely to come from health-tested backgrounds, some “designer dogs” get the worst of both worlds and inherit different problems from each parent.

So what is the difference between a Bullmastiff and a labradoodle? The Bullmastiff (or any other purebred) breeds true, and puppies can be guaranteed to be as advertised. Purebred dogs are the result of research, artistry and dedication. While there are some irresponsible breeders and problems in the purebred fancy, purebred dogs are healthy and reliable overall. Labradoodles and other mixes are a hodgepodge of possibilities that cannot be predicted, thrown together in an effort to make a quick buck. Size, colour, coat type and temperament are a guess at best.

### **A wake-up call**

People “in dogs” have no idea of the gulf that exists between them and the average person looking for a pet. Despite the obvious discrepancies between myth and reality, many people continue to believe the doodle hype. Purebred-dog clubs and breeders need to realize that they are in direct competition with the doodle merchants because many people think a St. Berdoodle is a breed.

Purebred breeders are passionate and protective of their breeds and have been in the habit of downplaying them to discourage too much popularity. It’s not untypical for a breeder to answer puppy queries by listing all the reasons their breed is not suitable for everybody, especially the person calling to enquire. There are breeders who won’t sell to pet homes, or who breed only if they want to keep a puppy for their own breeding program, leaving potential pet owners puppy-less and feeling snubbed.

Responsible breeders don’t like to advertise in newspapers, and are afraid to market their dogs because they don’t want to be perceived as puppy merchants. If responsible breeders are hard to find or won’t breed for the pet market, then pet buyers will go where they can get a puppy – straight to the designer-dog merchant who makes them feel special because they have a special dog that is “better than a purebred.” Once they have that puppy, they will love it, protect it and defend it as passionately as any purebred breeder.

The world of purebred dogs needs to wake up and get marketing, educating and reaching out to the average pet-buying person or watch as oodles of doodles fill the need for pet dogs.

By Naomi Kane

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