

Schnoodle	Eskapoo
Doxiepoo	<i>StBerdoodle</i>
Labradoodle	Daisy Dog
Foxhoodle	<i>Goldendoodle</i>
Cockapoo	Poogle
Double Doodle	Maltipoo
<i>Aussiedoodle</i>	Corgipoo
<i>Poochín</i>	Cavapoo
Newfypoo	Pugapoo
Sheepadoodle	

A Word About "Designer Dogs"

Here's a topic that's bound to spark controversy—the "hybrids" or "designer dogs." Many combine a Poodle (for its non-shedding coat) with another breed. Think of a cross—no matter how unlikely—"Newfypoo, anyone?"—someone has tried it. Before we go further—the term "hybrid" is not appropriate for a mixed breed dog. A hybrid refers to breeding across species, such as a male donkey bred to a female horse to produce a mule. And, with the possible exception of the Australian Labradoodle (distinct from the "labradoodle"), which does have a breed standard, these designer dogs are not breeds. They are mixed breed dogs or mongrels. And, neither the AKC nor the UKC recognizes the poodle crosses as breeds.

Some crosses, such as the cockapoo (American Cocker Spaniel/Poodle) have been around for years. Over the last decade, the rising popularity of the Lab/Poodle and Golden Retriever/Poodle crosses have spawned a growing market in these "designer breeds" and greater creativity among those breeding dogs for profit. This article focuses on the labradoodle, but the same principles apply to other "designer dogs."

The Origin of the Labradoodle

The Australian Labradoodle was created almost 25 years ago by Wally Conron, a manager at the Royal Guide Dog Association of Australia. His purpose was to produce a guide dog for a blind woman in Hawaii whose husband was allergic to dog hair. First, he tried training Standard Poodles as guide dogs, without success. He then bred a Lab bitch to a Standard Poodle stud dog. The name "labradoodle" was created to make the resulting puppies more attractive to the prospective foster homes needed to raise and socialize them. Most families wanted to foster purebred puppies, so Conron told them that he had created a new breed—the labradoodle.

After hair and saliva samples were sent to Hawaii, only one of the puppies in that first litter proved tolerable to the woman's husband. In a second litter, only three of 10 puppies proved to be non-irritating to people with allergies.

Today, Conron says that if he could do it over, he would never have bred that first litter. Quoted in the U.K.'s *Guardian* on November 13, 2010, Conron said "All those backyard breeders are jumping on the bandwagon, and they're crossing any kind of dog with a Poodle. They're selling them for more than a purebred is worth and they're not going into the

backgrounds of the parents of the dogs. There are so many Poodle crosses having fits, problems with their eyes, hips and elbows, a lot have epilepsy... if you're going to buy a labradoodle, check both parents, make sure they have a certificate [of health testing]. A lot of them are untrainable."

Didn't all breeds have to start somewhere?

Absolutely. Some are ancient (dogs resembling modern sighthounds are pictured in Egyptian tombs) and others quite recent (the Black Russian Terrier was developed as a guard dog for the gulags in the Soviet Union). However, each breed was developed for a specific purpose, and not just to produce income or a dog with a cute name.

The Australian Labradoodle began with a purpose, though the experiment was abandoned by Australia's Royal Guide Dog Association. Other breeders in Australia continued to produce these crosses, and ultimately wrote a breed standard in an attempt to provide some consistency. However, the vast majority of labradoodle producers (as well as the legions producers of other "designer dogs"), aren't trying to create a lasting breed and aren't breeding toward any type of breed standard, or blueprint. They are simply breeding to make money and to ride the crest of a wave of popularity.

What's the harm?

Good question. Each breed—from Otterhounds to Pekingese—has its devotees. Some fanciers devote their lives to trying to produce a dog that perfectly matches the standard established for their breed. This is an impossible task, but the excitement comes from seeing improvement from generation to generation. Most take a dim view of seeing "their" breed combined with another and given a catchy name. Why they are concerned can be understood by looking at a few of the claims made for the Poodle crosses:

- **They are healthier than the purebred parents (hybrid vigor).**

Wrong. First, these dogs aren't hybrids at all—they are mixed breeds. Looking at Standard Poodles and Labs, there are some diseases common to both (hip dysplasia, progressive retinal atrophy) and some found in one breed or the other (sebaceous adenitis, various heart diseases, exercise induced collapse). Depending on the mode of inheritance, when you combine the genetic material of two or more breeds, you may see diseases found in either of the parents. Mixed breed dogs can have allergies, hip dysplasia, and eye issues. But because they aren't tracked as purebreds are, it's difficult to compare the statistics.

If you are considering a designer dog, be sure that **each** parent has received **all** of the health tests recommended by its parent club. In the case of a labradoodle, the websites for the Poodle Club of America and the Labrador Retriever Club, Inc. will list the health conditions found in the constituent breeds and the recommended pre-breeding testing. Realize that the three varieties of Poodles (standard, miniature, and toy) all have different health concerns. If there are Miniature Poodles in your dog's background, for instance, make sure that they have been tested for the gene causing osteochondrodysplasia (dwarfism), an issue that isn't found in Standard Poodles.

Realize, too, that F1B second generation crosses are Poodle/Lab crosses bred back to a Poodle to try to “fix” the non-shedding nature of the Poodle coat. The dog is now $\frac{3}{4}$ Poodle, and $\frac{1}{4}$ Lab. Even in a breeding of two first generation (F1) labradoodles, genetic material from each breed can be found on both sides of the pedigree.

- **They are hypoallergenic.**

Wrong again. There is no such thing as a hypoallergenic dog. Because Poodles (and Bichons and Portuguese Water Dogs, among others) have hair rather than fur, they do not shed the way other breeds do. While people who are irritated by shedding breeds may be able to tolerate a dog with hair, some cannot. Some people are actually allergic to proteins in the dog’s saliva, and not the hair. No reputable Poodle breeder would call their dogs “hypoallergenic,” nor should the breeders of Poodle crosses.

- **The parents are “AKC” so they must be of good quality.**

The American Kennel Club is a registry—the largest and most recognized in the U.S. AKC-registerable puppies have purebred parents, themselves registered with the AKC or a recognized foreign registry. The AKC breed standards, or blueprints, for each breed are written by the parent breed clubs. The AKC maintains the stud book for each breed and registers purebred offspring.

While it has many associated functions—credentialing judges, setting the rules for competition, awarding conformation and performance titles, and sponsoring canine veterinary research, among others—the AKC’s core function is to register purebred dogs. AKC papers do not guarantee:

1. Quality puppies
2. Healthy puppies from health-tested parents
3. Puppies that conform to the breed standard
4. Purebred puppies, if the breeder is dishonest

The validity of AKC papers depends in large part upon the honesty of the breeder. There are some attempts at safeguards—stud dogs are required to be DNA-profiled after six breedings, or more than three breedings in a calendar year. The AKC can inspect kennels and breeders’ records, and will revoke the registration of dogs and litters when discrepancies are found. However, reliance is placed on the ethics of purebred dog breeders, and the mere existence of AKC papers does not guarantee healthy, well-socialized purebred parents that conform to the standard of their breed.

It against the ethical standards of Poodle Club of America-affiliated regional clubs (such as the Poodle Club of Massachusetts, the affiliate club for Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Maine) for members to allow their Poodles to be bred to other breeds.

- **My designer puppy is registered.**

Neither the AKC nor its chief competitor, the UKC (United Kennel Club) registers mixed breed puppies, though mixed breeds may participate in AKC performance events such as obedience, rally, and agility. A host of other registries have sprung up—America’s

Pet Registry, the Dog Registry of America, and on and on. These exist to supply “papers” for puppies produced by commercial breeders. Some may be mixed breeds, or nonstandard versions of AKC breeds—such as unusually large (“royal”) or small (“teacup”) puppies. There is no legitimate reason to use one of these “off brand” registries vs. the AKC or UKC.

Should I buy a “designer dog?”

Mixed breed dogs make great pets. It’s a rare purebred breeder who has not owned and loved a mixed breed or two. However, realize that your designer puppy may not have the qualities of the constituent breeds that you want—consistency is not a hallmark of mixed breeds. And your puppy may have a few qualities that you don’t want. In purchasing a designer dog, you are paying a premium price for a mixed breed puppy.

Instead, why not check rescue organizations and your local shelters—they may well have the perfect addition for your family, without the large price tag. If you do decide to buy a designer dog from a breeder, make sure that you insist on the same health guarantees and health testing of the parents that responsible purebred breeders would provide. Reputable breeders assume lifelong responsibility for any puppy they produce—meaning that they are willing to take a dog back at any point in its life. Reputable designer dog breeders should do the same.

And before you start your search, make a list of the qualities and characteristics that you want in your next pet. Then, do your research—look at a number of breeds, attend some dog shows or performance events, and talk to people experienced in the various breeds you are considering. That way, you’ll find the right dog for you.

Note: The information supplied in this document represents the opinion of the writer and is based on personal experience and research. It is supplied for information only. Please consult with your veterinarian and reputable breeders, shelters, and rescue organizations. Never buy a puppy or kitten from a pet shop or other commercial establishment. No reputable breeder would sell their puppies through a broker or pet shop. Reputable breeders want to know where their puppies go, want to keep track of their health and temperaments, and stand ready to provide advice and support to their owners—for the life of the dog.

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