

# Designing Your Own TM

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*Properly trained, a man can be dog's best friend.*

*Author ~ Corey Ford*



With the introduction of the Tibetan Mastiff into the American Kennel Club breeders knew that there would have to be some adjustment period and some kind of preparation required for the onslaught of curiosity into the breed. The public can suddenly become attracted to that look that they see in the show ring or on television and these people take the time to investigate the breed a little closer. Some people really seem to like the idea of the TMs complex nature and, as is always the case, they want what is new and different. There is an unfortunate off-shoot of their investigations, however, with some of the latest requests asking legitimate breeders for the chance to reserve quality puppies so that they can be crossbred with another breed. These overtures are most unwelcome.

It is becoming apparent that while many people may like the look of the Tibetan Mastiff, they don't have any intention of accepting the "total package." They want to cross the Tibetan Mastiff with some other breed that is "softer" or they want to mate their dogs with another breed that is more easily trained. It may be that their desire to outcross has to do with the need to tweak the breed's innate guardian temperament.

## **The Unintentional TM-Cross Breeding**

In large part, it falls upon the breeder to do everything in his/her power to prevent the potential "oopsie" breeding in the new home. It is the breeder's responsibility to inquire about the other breeds that are being raised in that household. Are there intact males and females on property? Is it possible that an accidental breeding can take place in the future? Find out why dogs that are already part of the family are not fixed. Breeders must make it plain that intact animals of the opposite sex need to

be neutered or spayed. Many owners do not realize that some TM male puppies are physically able to sire a litter around the 6-month mark. They also do not realize that TM females can reproduce at less than a year old while they are also still babies themselves.

Dogs of every breed are driven by the instinctual urge to reproduce and many TMs have a high reproductive drive. Owners need to understand that dogs will breed with their own siblings, their own father/mother, the dog down the street or the 11-year old mongrel female living right in the same home. Dogs don't know or care about the human taboos that we place on such things. It's not about chocolates, flowers and a promise. It's not about a love story. Both sexes have been known to chew their way through chain link fences, break out from behind secured garage or bedroom doors, or jump out second-story windows to get a breeding done.

### **The Intentional TM-Cross Breeding**

As owners and breeders of Tibetan Mastiffs know, it is easy to understand why many people "fall in love" with the idea of the Tibetan Mastiff breed. The over-used superlatives, the majesty and noble look of puppies and adults can make these dogs seem quite attractive. But having someone approach with the idea that a purebred will be crossed back to some other breed is, quite frankly, insulting. And the request is disheartening to say the least. It is a sickening slap in the face for all of those hard working breeders who take it upon themselves to promote, preserve and protect the integrity of an entire breed. It is extremely difficult to come to terms with those that don't have any regard for maintaining the high standards of breeding sound champion bloodlines. Even with the current and apparently fashionable trend of "designer dogs," no ethical purebred dog breeder purposefully mixes two breeds together or will knowingly place one of their dogs in a situation in which these circumstances are intended.

"A purebred of one breed + a purebred of another breed = a mongrel with a compilation of characteristics/temperament of both breeds."

Simply stated: It is best to be prepared to accept the best AND the worst qualities that each breed will bring. It will not be some perfect combination of the two.

### **The Integral Elements of a Breeding Program**

Responsible and ethical breeders of purebred Tibetan Mastiffs (and, if we may be so bold as to speak on behalf of breeders of ALL purebred dog breeds everywhere,) do everything in their power to protect the unique nature and blood lines of their chosen breed. Good breeding programs for purebred dogs are developed slowly and thoughtfully evolve over many years. Many TM breeders travel the world and some are lucky enough to make the ultimate pilgrimage to Tibet, the breed's country of origin, to ensure that dogs are imported with solid pedigrees and that the dogs themselves represent the very best of what is offered. Conscientious breeders do not "try" to keep their lines pure. They do everything they can to guarantee it. Complete and generational pedigrees along with documented registration are essential and all

responsible breeders are quite determined to keep an accurate accounting of their breeding animals. They can often trace lineage back to specific founding dogs.

### Trying to Change the Tibetan Mastiff's Guardian Temperament

There are sites out there that promote the TM's "livestock guardian" character but many breeders do not agree with this assessment. While it is true that the dogs may have been left out to guard the flocks, they do not have the same working temperament as other more conventional livestock guardians such as the Great Pyrenees or the Maremma. Instead, it may be more correct to simply state that the Tibetan Mastiff is a guardian breed and it is this simplicity that is promoted at the TMBRN site. It has been proven over and over again that some TMs have a very high prey drive. They have been known to attack and kill livestock such as chickens and goats. Some dogs that have no exposure to livestock will often kill domesticated or wild animals such as cats, mice, partridge, skunks, rabbits or groundhogs should these animals intrude on their territory.

The Tibetan Mastiff character is a primitive one but crossing it with a more "domesticated" one that is more easily recognized for its steadfast livestock guardian characteristics does not necessarily mean that an owner is going to get that nice blending of the two. Breeding animals and genetics just does not work that way. An individual must consider that s/he may end up with dogs that look like the Great Pyrenees but still have the typical Tibetan Mastiff temperament. Or it may be that puppies are born looking like Tibetan Mastiffs and acting like Tibetan Mastiffs. Either way, one is most likely to get puppies that stem from a VERY challenging background.

The maturation process is long and involved and the TM goes through many phases. Being guided through that process is something a responsible breeder will help a new owner with but it can only be severely complicated when another breed is added to the equation. First time TM owners who go on to produce crossbred litters because "their dogs are nice and all my friends and family want a puppy" still have no intimate understanding of the Tibetan Mastiff character. Without experience in the breed those who do produce a mongrel litter of 6-8 puppies are faced with having to deal with a character they do not understand many times over, whether it is in their own home or the homes where the puppies are eventually sold. A one-time breeding does not give anyone the knowledge or expertise to judge what will make a sound dog from a mixed-breed litter. Judging the character of an eight-week old innocent puppy is no foundation to determining the true character of a full-grown dog that will undoubtedly be influenced by Tibetan Mastiff character.

Responsible Tibetan Mastiff breeders do not breed TMs for a living. Ensuring that there is secure fencing and essential veterinarian care, proper care of puppies/adults/premium food/travel costs, etc. all help to guarantee that there is no money in the breeding venture. Many breeders only breed one to two litters a year but they typically dedicate a monumental amount of hours of each day to prospective/new owners as they need support and guidance when it comes to the characteristics/territorial/dominance issues that the Tibetan Mastiff brings. Many breeders also stand behind their dogs for their lifetimes. They may even have contractual agreements that dogs will be returned and re-homed should owners not

be able to care for them anymore. Many TM mixes are dropped off in shelters because there is no lifetime support from "occasional" breeders.

### **The Hard Reality for Purebred TM Fanciers/Breeders**

While trying to care for their own dogs and those that they have bred, established breeders, along with TM organizations/clubs and Tibetan Mastiff Rescue are all constantly called upon to decide the fate of TM-cross bred dogs. Asked to assess the character of these dogs, dedicated people struggle continually to find new forever homes for dogs that have been dumped in shelters because of developing behavioral issues that no one but an experienced TM owner/breeder can address. These same individuals also have to make the heartbreaking decisions to put some of these mixed rescues to sleep because owners were not informed/prepared for the basic realities of the Tibetan Mastiff or because of resulting health complications that were introduced by cross-breeding to a breed that did have health/disease issues. Knowing that the purebred Tibetan Mastiff is a reasonably healthy and long-lived breed makes these added complications especially tough to accept. It's difficult not to be resentful of those who want to add more mixes to the scene.

### **"The Tibetan Mastiff is what it is."**

If you are a person looking to acquire a Tibetan Mastiff, please ensure that you are prepared to embrace the Tibetan Mastiff for itself. It is not a room or a car to be customized according to your individual tastes. It is not the breed for everyone even if you are a GREAT dog owner. The Tibetan Mastiff is what it is and it is simply illogical and unjust to try to make it into something that it is not. The most wonderful news lies in the knowledge that if you cannot accept what the TM is, there are hundreds of other breeds out there to choose from that do fulfill the exacting requirements that you have.

It is extremely unfortunate that there are those "breeders" out there who will only see the dollar signs should people contact them in their efforts to seek out dogs to cross to other breeds. These people do not accept responsibility for their dogs; they typically are not knowledgeable about the breed even if they own Tibetan Mastiffs and are commonly called backyard breeders and puppy millers. Purchasing from such unsavory characters is always to be discouraged. It is never to their advantage to care for the welfare of the breed and they have a horrible and negative impact on all that they touch.

Do not be part of the problem and make sure that you are part of the solution. Instead of supporting an irresponsible pet dealer or even becoming one yourself, visit the shelter for your own "designer" mixed breed dog. There are more one-of-a-kind dogs there than you can ever dream of and they won't cost you thousands of dollars.

*If, however, it is a purebred Tibetan Mastiff that you desire with all that this entails, your only responsible choice is to go to an accountable and ethical breeder.*