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When a Pug and a Beagle Fall in Love, It's a Puggle

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By MIRIAM GOTTFRIED

Please, don't call these dogs mutts.

They're goldendoodles, cockapoos and puggles and they are among the most popular cross-bred dogs in the U.S., according to the American Canine Hybrid Club. Nipping at their heels are cavachons, shih-poops and schnoodles, says the organization, which has registered and named 671 different hybrid combinations since it started registering litters in 1990.

Who's Your Doggy?

What breeds combine to make this dog?



- a. affenpinscher and brussel griffon
- b. papillon and silky terrier

See if you can guess the parentage of some hybrid pups.

• [More photos and interactive graphics](#)

More dog owners are looking to create custom varieties that combine in a single dog the best traits of two purebreds. This has spawned an industry of breeders who specialize in hybrids. (Hybrid pooches, of course, have been created naturally for centuries in back yards, alleyways and other places where mutts mingle.)

"My dog doesn't have the bark of the beagle. He is calmer," says Lisa Zellitti of Mountain View, Calif., who recently bought a Pekingese-beagle hybrid, known as a peagle. "Pekingese are less social, and I wanted a dog that was good around people."

Peagles are popular for their mild manners, silky taupe-and-white fur and slightly droopy eyes, says Chelle Rohde, who sold Ms. Zellitti her dog, Lucas.

Ms. Rohde acts as a sort of puppy middleman, paying a breeder in Arkansas to have litters of various hybrid puppies—as well as the occasional purebred—shipped to her Fairfield, Calif., home, where she lists them on her website for \$675 to \$795—a price often comparable to that of a registered purebred puppy. Ms. Rohde says she works with reputable breeders and ensures that both parents are registered purebreds.

Puggles are the most popular for their size and family-friendly temperament. Many buyers also look for hybrids with hypoallergenic fur and dogs that don't shed, such as the cavapoo, cockapoo and shih-poo. Ms. Rohde and other breeders say they often have a waiting list for the most popular hybrids.

While the possibilities of designer dogs may seem limitless, breeders say they exercise common sense in match-making and aren't trying to mate large breeds with small. Customers typically do their research online beforehand to determine which hybrids out there fit their needs, says Cindy Miller, an Aurora, Mo., breeder of shorkie tzus (shih tzu-Yorkshire terrier).



Carol Bobrowsky of Mulberry Farm Cockapoos bred pure-breds dogs until she met her first Cockapoo, a Cocker Spaniel-Poodle mix. Now she caters to the demand for crossbreeds. She talks with WSJ's Christina Tsuei about the desire for customizing dogs and the benefits of mixing.

For the most part, designer dogs are not hard to breed. Ms. Miller says she simply puts the two dogs together when the female is fertile. The animal's size can sometimes make things a bit tricky. Ms. Miller has one yorkie male that is only 2½ pounds—too small for some of her larger females—so she has used artificial insemination to breed that dog. When hybrids are bred with other hybrids, some breeders continue to tout their lineage, but they are not currently recognized by the American Canine Hybrid Club.

Hybrid dogs are still not that common. For every hundred litters registered with America's Pet Registry, there may be six hybrid litters registered with the American Canine Hybrid Club, its subsidiary, says Susan Richmond, co-owner of American's Pet Registry. For example, there were only 39 registered aussie-poops last year, despite it being the registry's 10th most popular hybrid breed for 2010. Breeders who register litters with the ACHC must provide proof that the puppies' parents are purebreds, which increases their appeal with consumers.

For some, the novelty is the appeal. Michael Crane of Rohnert Park, Calif., and his girlfriend, Amanda Rojee, recently bought a beaglier, a beagle, King Charles spaniel mix, from Ms. Rohde that they named Charlie Brown.

"We can't go anywhere without people saying what a beautiful dog she is," Mr. Crane says. "No one has ever heard of a beaglier, but everyone who sees her wants one."

Not all designer combinations are destined for success, says N. Matthew Ellinwood, a professor specializing in canine genetics in the department of Animal Science at Iowa State University. "I wouldn't breed a pug with an English bulldog," he says, because both breeds are brachycephalic, or have pushed-in snouts, which means a tendency for breathing disorders.



A Shih-poo

Chelle Rohde

And while the mother of a hybrid dog is typically from the larger of the two breeds to ensure she can carry the offspring, there are still some combinations that don't seem right, Dr. Ellinwood says. "I don't know of any instances in the literature where anyone has taken a great Dane and bred it with a Chihuahua."

Disputing a common belief, Dr. Ellinwood says there have been no definitive studies showing that hybrids are healthier than purebreds. There are a fair number of cases where mixed-breed dogs still hold the genetic propensity for disease from their purebred parents, he says.

To reduce health risks, Ms. Miller, the Missouri breeder, has the parents of her dogs genetically tested to ensure they don't carry liver disease or have retinal dysplasia, two ailments that can occur in Yorkshire terriers and shih tzus. The cost of the tests, along with other expenses, brings the price of her shorkie tzus to \$1,600 each.

Rosemary Traettino of Ocean Township, N.J., has a Yorkshire terrier, that is now 14 years old and also weighs 14 pounds— much larger than the typical yorkie. But she wanted to be sure her second dog was smaller. Plus, she fell in love with the calm personality of her neighbor's shih tzu.

"I said, 'Gee if I could get a yorkie with the personality of a shih tzu, that would be perfect,' " she says.

In the end, she contacted Ms. Miller and got just what she wanted: a shorkie she named Maggie Mae. The pup is about six pounds and is not high strung.

Liking that she could select a certain look and personality in her dogs, Ms. Traettino recently contacted Ms. Miller again to buy another shorkie puppy that she and her kids were eyeing. This one she plans to name Lulu.

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