

Cost of raising a Litter of Puppies

I am asked quite often why puppies cost as much as they do. There are breeders out there that sell their puppies anywhere from \$500 to \$5000. So, why do some breeders charge more than other breeders for their puppies? Part of the problem is we have such a range of what people do while raising their puppies. We have people who basically throw two dogs together, don't care at all about their dogs and don't do anything but the bare minimum while raising them, then there are breeders that go above and beyond, making sure they have the best lines, health test, socialize, do basic training and more.

This is an average of the base expenses that you will see in a well run breeding program. This obviously will change due to where you live due to vet and supply costs being different in different places, but this will give you an idea.

I will be doing this study based on my breed, but this will vary within different breeds.
First you have initial costs before you even breed:

Cost of a breeding Dog:

Most breeders will find breeding dogs from breeders that already do health testing on their adults, due to this the cost of a breeding dog is more expensive. A breeder will pay for the puppy price plus a breeding fee. This ranges quite a lot in price. I have seen puppies from health tested parents with breeding rights range from \$3000 to \$15000.

Cost of Feeding per year:

Average cost of good quality food is \$70 per bag plus taxes. If we assume one bag per month, that equals around \$1000 per year in food costs. Plus \$200 per year for vitamin supplements.

Vet Care Per Year:

Vet Care includes vaccinations, deworming, flea and tick preventative. If there is no other treatments necessary (such as ear infections, injuries, etc.) this cost will come to around \$400 per year. But obviously could get much higher.

Health Testing:

Health Testing for every breed is different, but just doing Hip and Elbow Testing and breed specific DNA's, you are going to pay around \$1000. If you do eyes, patellas and other blood panels it can get upwards of \$2000.

Therefore, if we add these all up, we are looking at between \$7200 to \$20200 for the breeding dog before you even breed them (Let's assume around 2 years old. But, if we say on average, we are probably looking at around \$12000 (although I have had expenses above this).

Then we will go through the cost of raising a litter. Our average litter is 8 puppies, so we will base it off of 8 puppies.

Breeding Misc costs:

Progesterone Testing: \$120 to \$600
Brucellosis Testing: \$150
Ultrasound: \$100
X-ray: \$120
Stud Fee: \$2000 to \$6000

Cost of supplies needed before breeding:

Whelping Bed: \$650 (Can be used for several litters)
Kuranda Bed: \$160 (Can be reused for several litters)
Towels, blankets, whelping pads: \$100 (Can be used for a couple litters)
Toys and Treats: \$200 (Can be used for a couple litters)
Whelping supplies: \$200 (New things each litter)

Training Supplies:

Crates for crate training: \$500 (Can be used for several litters)
Litter Boxes: \$100 (Can be used for a couple litters)

Then when the puppies arrive:

Dewormer: \$160
Food: \$420
Milk Replacer: \$100
Pellets for Litter Box: \$240
Microchips: \$380
Health Exam: \$400
Vaccination: \$380
NuVet Vitamins: \$80
Fecal Tests: \$500
Heart worm, Flea and Tick Preventative: \$200
Gas for getting them used to the car and vet trips: \$100
Laundry Soap, Cleaners, Disinfectants, Paper Towels: \$100
Puppy Packages (harness, leash, small bag of food, toys, blanket, etc.) : \$1200 to \$2000

For a total litter cost of: \$8660

\$1410 of which is good for up to 10 litters before needing to be replaced, so each litters cost will be around \$7250.

So, if we assume that everything goes well and no C-Section (\$1500-\$3000), no injuries (\$200-\$1000), no supplementing (\$100-\$300 per puppy), or any other unforeseen issues. The cost of raising one litter once you pay for both the Dam and Sire and everything else listed, is between \$20000 and \$29000. With the average cost being around \$23500.

So, with 8 puppies in order to pay for one litter would need to be sold for \$2937 each. If the Dam has 4 litters and retires at 4 years old the cost per litter would go down since you don't have to pay for the female again or the whelping bed/kuranda beds and some supplies, but all other costs remain the same. An extra cost per litter of \$7250 plus food, vitamins and vet care for parents over 2 more years works out to about \$8450. This would work out to a cost of \$1526 per puppy.

This is in a perfect world where nothing goes wrong with any of the puppies or the adult dogs. This also doesn't take into account if the adult dogs need teeth cleaning (\$300), ear infection treatment (\$50), have any extra vet cares for anything (potentially 1000's). This also doesn't account for when you have a female or male that doesn't pass their health testing and you have to start all over with a new male or female or a female that can't get pregnant for some reason or a female that loses their litter. This at minimum will cost \$2500 for what you have put into them beyond their initial cost, even though they won't be able to have any puppies. But, in many cases will cost much more.

Obviously, some of these costs will go down as you have been breeding longer, since a male dog can be bred to more than one female and some supplies will last longer than four litters. Also a breeder that has been breeding for a long time will have lower costs for breeding dogs as they go simply because they will keep puppies back from their own breeding programs, so will only be losing the pet price on those dogs. But, other costs will go up and are not accounted for in this article, including treats for parent dogs, toys for parent dogs, beds for parent dogs, any injuries, infections or other miscellaneous vet care and much more.

Another thing to consider is the fact that raising puppies takes a lot of time. I know for myself, I do not leave the house in the first 2 weeks, as I want to monitor them and avoid things like the puppies being laid on, injuries, etc. I am up with the mother hand delivering the puppies, which usually lasts about 12 hours. After that for the first week, I am weighing puppies daily, spending time doing early neurological stimulation, washing their whelping pads and whelping area and much more.

After the first week, I am weighing puppies weekly, puppy photo shoots weekly (which takes more time to do each week), videos, cleaning their area a few times a day, disinfecting daily, Early Neurological Stimulation then Rule of Seven Socializations, among other socialization, litter training them, crate training them. If the weather is good, outings outside. All of this takes time. I probably spend an average of 224 hours just in the things I have to do with the puppies (since I won't count just time playing with them). Then on top of that I spend many hours emailing families, talking to them on the phone and meeting with them in my house to visit their puppy.

Then after the puppy goes home, there is also many times that I will be emailing or talking to families on the phone and sometimes visiting them in their home. Just for the emails, phone calls and visits alone before they leave my house, I probably spend on average 6 hours per family (many times more than this). Working out to 48 hours per litter. If I charged myself out at \$15 an hour, that would be \$3360 per litter. And let's face it, \$15 an hour would not be a fair wage for what most breeders do, and this is being on call all the time and not being able to go on vacations with your family because it is hard to find someone knowledgeable to watch puppies.

This also does not account for the time that a good breeder spends in constant research ensuring they are up to date with all the latest studies and research to keep their dogs healthy and happy. I know for myself, I have spent countless hours doing research on anything and everything that has to do with my breed. It is also very important to note that many breeders do not have another job, as it is difficult to get the time off a full time job to dedicate the time needed to raise a litter of puppies. The cost of not having a full time job can be significant.

I also have extra expenses myself for a variety of other things.

These things include:

- Cameras to monitor puppies when I am not home (\$100's)
- Extra data on my phone for using the cameras remotely
- Computer for the business
- Software for Pictures and Quickbooks Software
- Accounting costs
- Costs of hiring people to help with puppies time to time
- Camera for pictures
- Air purifier for puppies
- Props for pictures
- Extra supplements for my females after they have their puppies
- And many other things

Overall, nobody that is breeding correctly and for the love of the breed is doing it to make huge amounts of money. I hope that those that have great breeding programs do eventually make money, as they work extremely hard and sacrifice a lot to produce exceptional puppies.

Being a breeder is hard work, it is stressful, exhausting and can be frustrating dealing with public perception, but all of those things don't matter when you see the puppies you produce in loving homes, with great families that you spend hours screening. It is amazing how you can have a horrible day and go over to the area your litter of puppies are in and lay down and let them crawl all over you and all of a sudden you can't even remember why you were having a bad day. Or you see a child or adult that has struggled with different issues and you watch as your puppy has brought them out of heartache and pours happiness into their lives.

That is why I am a dog breeder and there is nothing I would rather do!