

SPOTLIGHT ON HEALTH: GENTRY BOXERS

Editor's note: Here at Raw Pet Digest, we're always looking for people and companies that are devoted to helping your dog and/or cat be as healthy as possible. And this issue, we're spotlighting Paula Vandervoort, who breeds and raises Naturally Reared (NR) Boxers. Paula also has an online store devoted to natural healing modalities and other products. Visit her store at <https://gentryboxers.3dcartstores.com/>. Visit Gentry Boxers: <http://www.gentryboxers.com/>.

1. I know you're passionate about naturopathy, natural health, and natural dog rearing. How did you first find out about natural feeding/healthcare and natural rearing of dogs? What drew you to them?

I bought a boxer puppy in 2010 from a breeder who suggested I feed him raw meat once I brought him home. At the time, I didn't know anything about that. I thought kibble was the only thing available for puppies. I agreed and started investigating what to buy and how to feed a balanced diet with raw food. I had been



Some of Gentry Boxers' NR puppies. Photo credit Paula Vandervoort

through a personal health crisis that had been helped immensely by shifting to a natural lifestyle and unprocessed organic whole foods, so it made sense to me a dog shouldn't eat processed food either. But up until then, I had never heard of raw feeding (I'd been feeding what I thought was "high-end" kibble). I just fell into raw feeding and all that went along with it, but once I opened that door, I realized there was so much more to raising healthy dogs than just paying attention to pedigrees and health screenings.

2. You have an online store. Tell me a little bit about it: what inspired it? What sort of products do you carry?

I hate to admit this, being a natural rearing dog breeder, but to be quite honest, I started my store because I raise a breed (Boxers) that require a docked tail in the show ring. In some countries natural tails are allowed, but not in the U.S. I was looking for less traumatic ways to dock tails. I came across a method that was extremely easy on the puppy and very effective. I believe if a cosmetic procedure is to be done, a breeder should do everything in his or her power to keep trauma to a minimum. I wanted the method to be available to others, so I put together a kit. I thought I would sell 5 or 10 of them, but to date I've sold thousands.

My store has given me the opportunity to discuss natural rearing with breeders all over the world. It's also given me a platform to offer some cool products for early development and support for dog breeders.

Over the years, my store has become a place to find natural modalities and supports. As I've learned more as a breeder, I've added products to my store that I either make myself or have found incredibly useful in raising more vital and healthy puppies. One example of a product like this is an Early Development Puppy Gym, which is one of my top-selling products. Breeders use it in the nursery to engage the minds and bodies of puppies as young as 3–4 weeks, and many puppy buyers have bought it to provide mental and physical stimulation for their youngsters (through about 18 months of age) once they bring their babies into their new homes.

I also offer tinctures and remedies to help support puppies who aren't thriving, natural flea/tick control, heartworm prevention, homeopathic remedies for dogs, and even help for dogs who might be vaccine-damaged. I also have some wonderful books to offer to those interested in natural rearing.

I also offer animal communication and wellness coaching sessions through my online store. If you've never experienced animal communication, it's well worth the investment to hear what your animal has to say to you!

3. I know you raise Naturally Reared (NR) boxers. What drew you to the breed? How long have you been breeding? Why did you decide to follow NR protocols?

That's a sad but interesting story. When I was quite young, a mixed-breed boxer attacked someone who was trying to hurt me. She belonged to the perpetrator, which caused the bad guy to turn on her. She saved me from harm but gave her own life in the process. That terrible experience taught me boxers have the most amazing hearts of any breed I've ever been around. To be willing to give your own life to save someone else is something I will never be able to repay. I knew I wanted to be a dog breeder, so I started with a boxer. I lucked into purchasing a show bitch from one of the top breeders who was willing to mentor me. I didn't even know what I had at the time, but she produced my first champion. I was hooked.

Boxers are also hysterically funny. I've learned a lot about how to "capture" behaviors that dogs naturally exhibit when doing clicker training. Boxers offer some funny behaviors such as twirling, standing on hind legs to look on top of counters, doing what we call "the pretzel" and even doing somersaults. They are such a fun breed to live with. They are kind, loyal to a fault, and easy to train.



I've been breeding show/performance and service boxers for over 40 years and have been thrilled to find dogs born in my nursery earning top awards in conformation, service, obedience, performance, and even trick dog titles.

I came across natural rearing after many years of breeding boxers. I knew there had to be a better way to raise dogs. Chronic illness was at an all-time high, and I was seeing their lifespans shorten. In my decades as a breeder, I was seeing dogs die at very young ages from things they didn't die from when I first started. I became a voracious student, researching everything I could find about how to help them thrive and stay vital.

Having recovered from a "permanently disabling disease" by making careful choices about what I put into and onto my own body, it made sense we could potentially improve our dogs' lives by living more mindfully. I knew it started with the food we offer to them, but what about the antibiotics, steroids, chemical wormers, toxic cleaners and injectable vaccines full of heavy metals?

Exploring these things opened the world of natural rearing to me, and I was able to help my own (very sick) dog Ginger completely with NR protocols. She wouldn't be here today if I had continued doing what I was doing. She was extremely ill at the age of 3 ½ due to vaccine side effects. She is now 11 and has outlived all 9 of her siblings. She recently earned her advanced lure coursing title, which is quite something for a boxer who has already lived past the normal lifespan of our breed.

4. I have seen some debate lately about what NR protocols exactly entail? Can you fill us in a bit on what, specifically, being an NR breeder means to you?

Natural rearing is like a pyramid. Without the wide base at the bottom, you'll always have a fragile piece of architecture. That wide base is diet. I always say, "You can't out-supplement a poor diet."

Dogs are carnivores: they are meant to eat prey. Therefore, feeding a prey model diet is mandatory. I feed something commonly called "frankenprey". This is feeding a variety of whole animal parts that, over time, simulate a wild prey diet.

Most people, especially breeders, have heard about dogs becoming seriously ill or dying from systemic worming medications like Trifexis. These types of things have no place in an NR program. There are many easy ways to control parasites without poisoning the dog in the process.

I also think many conventional breeders are using a lot of toxic chemicals they don't even realize are harmful to their dogs. I used to think if the cleaner didn't smell like Lysol or burn my eyes, it wasn't doing a good job. I was wrong. There are non-toxic ways to disinfect kennels and keep animal areas clean without damaging the dogs.

Anyone breeding dogs needs to have a basic understanding of genetics. Beyond that, however, I believe anyone who wants to get the most out of an NR program should study epigenetics and apply that science to their breeding program.

The most controversial part of natural rearing is the complete elimination of injectable vaccines. Most



Puppies! Photo credit Paula Vandervoort

traditional breeders are simply afraid that their dogs will get sick if they don't vaccinate. What they don't realize is their dogs are getting sick **because** they vaccinate. There is excellent information available now from sources like Dr. Ron Schultz and Dr. Jean Dodds about the harm vaccines can do. They can save lives in certain situations like shelters, but they have no place in an NR breeding program. Vaccine damage can be inherited, and it is extremely difficult to turn around. I know; I have dealt with it many times.

In summary, the highlights of an NR program are:

- Feeding a high-quality raw diet
- Maintaining a solid understanding of genetics and epigenetic influences
- Providing the appropriate anti-

oxidants, trace minerals, and whole food supplements

- Using natural heartworm and parasite deterrents, along with natural antibiotics
- Employing homeopathic remedies, flower essences, and essential oils where appropriate
- Only using non-toxic household products and cleaners

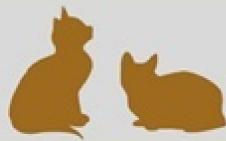
5. What sort of differences do you see between naturally reared dogs and conventionally reared dogs?

I doubt I have enough space to answer that question fully, and my NR program hasn't been through enough generations yet for me to know what the full effect will be over time. However, some of the immediate and profound changes are in coat, teeth, breath, and stools. Just a few weeks of a quality raw

diet can turn a dry, prickly coat into a soft, deep color that you want to pet all the time. I've seen dental problems resolve, gingival hyperplasia reverse, eyes brighten, and behaviors soften.

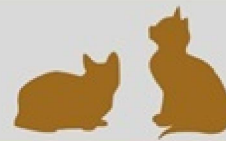
But what is invisible is the changes that occur on the inside. I believe my dogs are as beautiful on the inside as they are on the outside now. I run many health screens on my dogs, including echos, x-rays,





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DNA tests, and blood screens. I have seen a big improvement in those screens, especially on an individual basis. So, I hope to see that improvement over generations as well.

6. Do you consistently find that later generations of naturally reared dogs live longer, healthier lives than others?

Yes, definitely. I know NR breeders in other breeds who have been doing this much longer than I have who report lifespans up to double the normal for their breeds. Mine are definitely much healthier. They can be exposed to parasites and don't get a disease-causing population. Breeders are way too afraid of parasites in my opinion. The wild wolf populations aren't dying of heartworm even though they test positive. Because they have excellent immune systems, parasites aren't an issue. Mine also rarely get sick, and if they do, it's minor. One of my NR dogs went to the American Boxer Club Nationals a few years back, and we roomed with a dog who was deathly ill with kennel cough that progressed into pneumonia. My boxer laid next to her to comfort her. That dog had to be taken to the ER, but my dog never even had a sniffle or a hack.

7. What sort of advice do you give to people who are looking for a puppy?

- Look for an experienced breeder who knows the standard and does all the recommended health screens. That's not negotiable.

- Go to the Natural Rearing Breeders Association for a referral to a breeder who has been certified as an NR breeder.
- If you're getting a puppy from a traditional breeder, ask them to forgo vaccinations and worming medicines and to use natural alternatives. Ask them to offer raw meat in the diet.
- Look for breeders who do a lot of early development work (for example, BioSensor and Puppy Culture). That makes a huge difference in how puppies behave as they transition into a new home and throughout their lives.
- Get informed about how to raise your puppy naturally by reading books like *Natural Rearing* by Dr. Jeannie Thomason ND, *Natural Immunity* by Pat McKay, and your book (*Let Food Be Their Medicine: Using Nature's Principles to Help Your Dog Thrive*).

8. Do you have any specific ideas on why diseases like cancer are appearing in our dogs at younger and younger ages?

I do. And it's based on research and experience. In the 1970s, approximately 1 in 10 dogs were diagnosed with cancer. It was a disease of the old as well. Now dogs as young as 12 weeks are being diagnosed with cancer, and 70% of dogs will be diagnosed with cancer at some stage in life.

Since the 1970s, our environment has become much more toxic and our processed foods have become less and less nutritious. We're exposing our dogs to toxins, including cleaning

chemicals, yard chemicals, toxic personal care products, systemic worming insecticides, and even vaccines laden with heavy metals. Our dogs are very sensitive to toxins, much more than we are. And it shows in the chronic diseases like cancer that are showing up in so many dogs, even young ones.

9. Are you seeing these sorts of diseases among any of the naturally bred/raised dogs?

I definitely see much less disease in naturally reared dogs. When disease occurs, it is less severe. I have even seen cancer reversed using natural means, even in one of my own dogs. My senior cooked up a mast cell tumor last year and we turned it around with high levels of antioxidants and essential oils pretty easily. I have a high level of confidence that natural rearing protocols will produce less hypothyroidism, pancreatitis, diabetes, arthritis, and even cancer.

10. There are lots of raw diet philosophies out there (commercially prepared raw, prey model raw, a mix of raw foods that are cut up for the animal, etc.). Have you found one type that you prefer?

I've journeyed through all those types of feeding. I prefer to feed as many whole animal parts as possible while maintaining the right ratio of muscle/bone/organ over time. It doesn't need to be done in every bowl at every meal. It doesn't happen in the wild either. Wild canids sometimes get fresh prey and sometimes scavenge, and

that is what they are meant to have. That's why it's called frankenprey feeding. I do keep some pre-formulated blends on hand with meat/bone/organ/tripe so that I can easily mix in supplements when necessary, but it's not the biggest part of their diet.

11. What is your favorite thing about boxers?

They truly have a soul in their eyes. They can be comical, yet regal. They are deep beyond words.

12. What sort of diseases, specifically, do you see in conventionally reared boxers, and are those same diseases a problem in naturally reared boxers? Why or why not?

Conventionally raised boxers are much more likely to experience pancreatitis, thyroid abnormalities, early onset arthritis, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, and even cancer. Researchers are finding definite links between these diseases and poor diet, chemical exposures, vaccines, and even the overuse of antibiotics that suppress gut health.

13. I know you are very knowledgeable about using essential oils to help your dogs stay balanced and thriving. What is one of your favorite oils, and why?

Frankincense, but it must be medical grade and sourced directly from the grower. It's an affordable, high-frequency oil with so many benefits. It supports proper immune system function and helps to repair damaged DNA. In combination with

Copaiba, it is a powerhouse that can help with some severe imbalances.

14. What is your take on parvo and other “puppy diseases”? I’m also interested in hearing about some of the ways you build natural immunity.

Passive immunity to puppy diseases is conveyed through colostrum from a healthy mom’s milk. That immunity wanes in a half-life every two weeks until it is too low to be of use. Permanent, or “active”, immunity can be provoked after that time by exposing a puppy to recently vaccinated puppies in puppy kindergarten. I encourage all owners of NR puppies to enroll in kindergarten as soon as their puppy settles in from the transition between homes. This not only provides excellent socialization, but when they are sniffing one another, the NR babies bring the viral particles that are shed by the vaccinated babies in through their nose and mouth as nature intended, creating antibodies. Exposing a puppy at a low level to a pathogen gives the body a chance to mount a permanent defense so that if it ever encounters the pathogen again, it is ready to defeat it.



Paula and Ginger. By any standard, Gentry Boxer's Natural Rearing breeding program is truly successful.