

Dog Breed Characteristics & Behavior

Why is it important to know about the characteristics and behavior of different breeds?

All dogs are individuals and have their own personalities. At the same time, different breeds tend to also have certain characteristics that help define that particular breed. This information can be helpful to you when you are choosing a dog or trying to understand his behavior.

The AKC (American Kennel Club) places dog breeds within seven different groups. In order to account for the different behaviors within a particular group, some groups can be further subdivided into families.

Herding group:

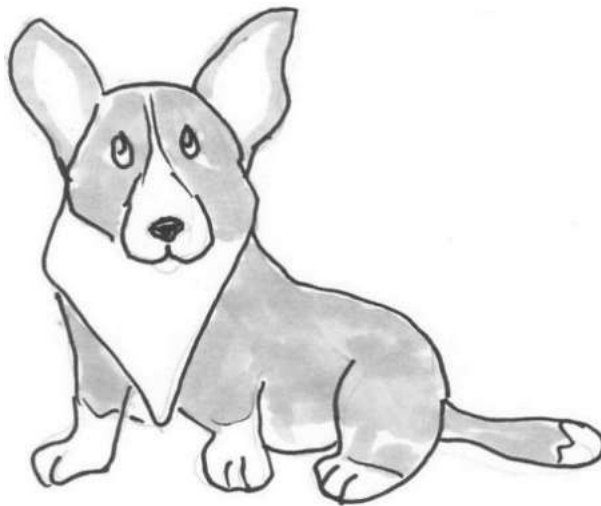
Breeds in this group were bred to herd sheep and cattle. They do this by stalking and staring, barking and/or nipping at their charges. They are bred to be intelligent, athletic and diligent and they are very trainable. Dogs from this group will do best with lots of exercise. They do even better if they have a job such as agility where they can use their natural athletic ability to navigate an agility course. Barking can be a problem if they are bored and they may attempt to “herd” their people-pack by nipping and chasing.

Characteristics:

- Alert
- Smart
- Independent
- Confident
- Trainable
- Loyal
- Affectionate

Herding breeds:

- Collies
- Sheepdogs
- Cattle dogs
- Corgis
- Shepherds
- Belgian Malinois
- Belgian Tervuren



Hound group:

Hounds were originally bred to hunt. Though not used to hunt as much now, the instinct is still strong in them. They will have a strong prey drive and will want to chase down small animals. Sighthounds can run forever and need off leash opportunities in safe, enclosed areas.

Characteristics:

- Independent
- Sweet
- Intelligent
- Affectionate

Families within the hound group:

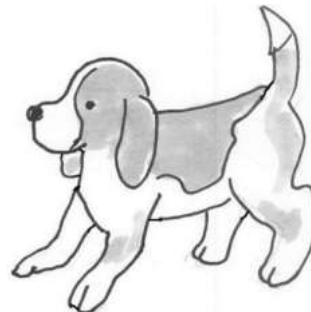
Sight hounds: Sight hounds were bred to find and chase down larger animals such as deer and elk. Sight hounds are long and lean and have excellent vision. Sighthounds can run for a long stretch, but they are basically sprinters. They run until they catch their prey, and then stop for a rest. In many parts of the world sighthounds are still used to hunt. They may not be interested in obedience work and can be hard to train.

- Afghan
- Saluki
- Ibizan
- Pharoah
- Greyhound
- Whippet
- Italian Greyhound
- Rhodesian Ridgeback (a sight & scent hound)



Scent hounds: Scent hounds are usually smaller than the sight hounds. They were bred to chase smaller prey to the ground. They have an incredible sense of smell and they typically have long ears. Bloodhounds and Bassets have ears that can scrape the ground when they are sniffing, and so stir up even more smells. Scent hounds are forever in search of a scent and will run away from you if a scent beckons.

- Beagle
- Basset Hound
- Bloodhound
- Otterhound
- Fox Hounds



Non-Sporting Group:

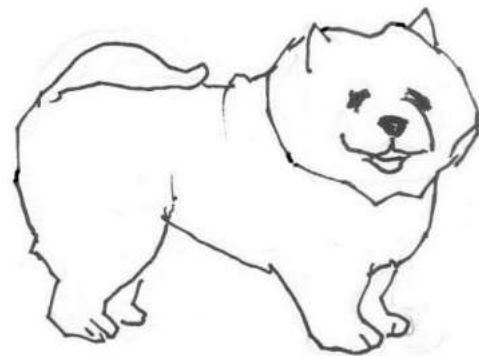
This is the fastest growing group and the dogs in it range in terms of size, shape, colors, coat types, etc. They are often dogs who no longer perform the duties for which they were originally bred. For example, the Dalmatian no longer accompanies carriages, the Bulldog is no longer a bull baiter and the Poodle is no longer a water-hunting dog. Their temperaments are as varied as their looks. This is the group where many of our “companion” animals come from.

Characteristics:

- Playful
- Smart
- Curious
- Friendly
- Loyal
- Eager

Non sporting breeds:

- American Eskimo
- Boston Terrier
- Bulldogs
- Shar-Pei
- Chow Chow
- Dalmation
- Keeshond
- Poodle
- Shiba-Inu
- Lhasa Apso
- Tibetan Terrier



Sporting group:

These dogs were originally bred to assist hunters in finding, pointing, flushing and retrieving game. Many still perform those jobs for hunters. They are loyal and trainable. These dogs can also be successful therapy dogs, assistance dogs and search/rescue dogs. They are generally very athletic, active and strong and will need plenty of exercise, and maybe even a job such as agility or fly ball. If these dogs don't get adequate daily exercise they can become frustrated and destructive.

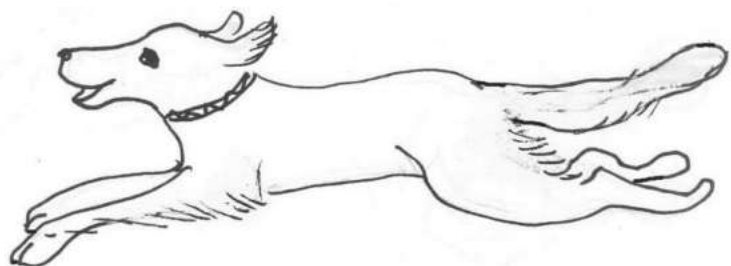
Characteristics:

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|-------------|
| • Happy | • Bright | • Confident |
| • Eager | • Friendly | • Lovable |
| • Trainable | | |

Families within the sporting group:

Retrievers: Retrievers are trained to go and get “it” and bring “it” back. “It” can be on land or in the water. Retrievers are usually outgoing, good natured and very energetic.

- Flat Coated and Curly Coated
- Labrador and Golden
- Chesapeake Bay (not as friendly and outgoing as they were also used as guard dogs)



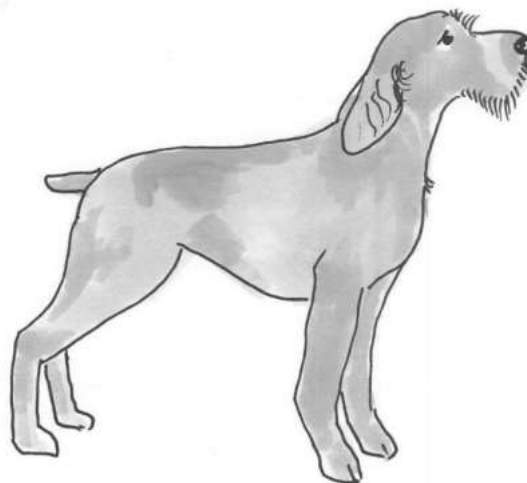
Spaniels: Spaniels are hunting dogs who were bred to flush or “spring” game from the bushes so the hunter could shoot it. These dogs are typically energetic and fun loving and will love the game of fetch. Note: Some strains of Cocker and Springer Spaniel develop a behavior problem known as “rage syndrome.” It is thought to be a form of dominant aggression or conflict behavior. It is characterized by attacking and biting for no apparent reason.

- American Water
- Clumber
- Cocker
- English Cocker
- English Toy
- English Springer
- Field
- Irish Water
- Japanese Chin
- Sussex Tibetan
- Welsh Spaniels



Pointers and Setters: Pointers were bred to find and point to the prey animal, usually birds. They are very energetic and at times nervous but generally have happy and tolerant dispositions. Setters are more sensitive and nervous.

- Vizsla
- German Shorthair
- Wirehaired and English Pointer
- Irish, English and Gordon Setters
- Weimaraner



Terrier Group:

Terriers were bred to chase after and kill vermin such as rats, foxes and weasels. Tenacious and determined to catch their prey, they will also burrow into the ground after them. Some of the terriers were bred to kill rats in pit contests, and later to fight each other. You do need to be on your toes if you are drawn to terriers!

Characteristics:

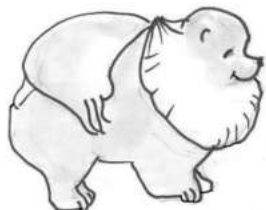
- Scrappy
- Energetic
- Independent
- Predatory
- Hardy
- Smart
- Playful

Terrier breeds:

- Airedale
- Bedlington
- Boston
- Bull
- Scottish
- Staffordshire
- Russell



Toy Group:



Dogs in this group are miniature versions of dogs from many other groups. Many are descended from larger terriers and spaniels and do retain some of those traits. The Pomeranian is descended from the Spitz family of dogs—the sled dogs of Iceland and Lapland! These small dogs usually have a lot of spirit and strong personalities. They can become the pack and household leader if the people don't take charge of the situation. They can also be snappy.

Characteristics:

- Sensitive
- Sassy
- Intelligent
- Alert
- Affectionate
- Fearless

Toy breeds:

- Cavalier King Charles
- Chihuahua
- Havanese
- Italian Greyhound
- Maltese
- Pomeranian

- Pekinese
- Toy Poodle
- Pug
- Shih Tzu
- Silky & Yorkshire Terriers

Working Group:

The working group includes dogs who were originally bred to be draft dogs, hunters and guardians. They are usually medium to large in size (over 40 pounds). These dogs are athletic, strong, courageous and loyal. These are dogs whom people have come to rely on.

Characteristics:

- Strong
- Courageous
- Loyal
- Affectionate
- Calm
- Protective
- Smart
- Confident

Families within the working group:

Northern Breeds: These beautiful dogs often look like wolves. Many are used in breeding Wolf Hybrids. A working Malamute can pull up to a ton of material a short distance and Huskies can travel pulling a loaded sled for many miles. Samoyeds are also sled dogs and the small sized American Eskimos are sled dogs who have been bred down to a smaller size. These dogs are very independent and may have a tendency to roam if their home base is not securely fenced. (Please review our handout on **Escape Artists.**)

- Akita
- Alaskan Malamute
- Siberian Husky
- Samoyed
- Norwegian Elkhound
- Finnish Spitz
- American Husky



Protection Breeds: Most protection dogs were originally bred to be herding dogs or flock guards. They are now used for a variety of purposes including police work and guarding homes and property.

- Akita
- Rottweiler
- Doberman Pinscher
- Bull Mastiff and Mastiff
- Great Dane
- Boxer
- Giant Schnauzer
- German Shepherd (also does protection work)
- Rhodesian Ridgeback (also does protection work)

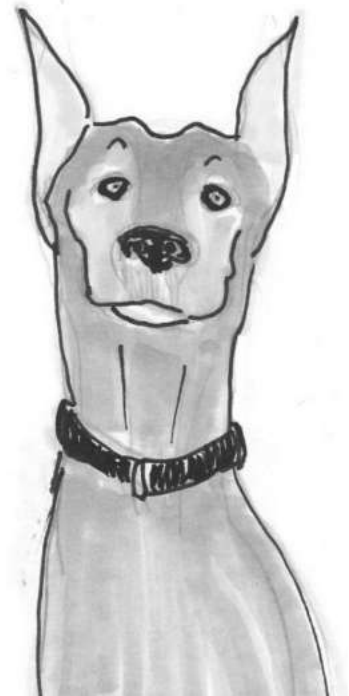
Flock Guards and Mountain Dogs: Flock guardians were bred to protect herds of sheep from predators. Many were bred to be white in color so they would blend in with their flock. These dogs tend to be protective of their families and are fearless. The Mountain Dogs are closely related to the flock guards. All these dogs are heavy boned and large. Both types will want to wander beyond their home base. (Please review our handout on **Escape Artists.**)

Flock Guard breeds:

- Great Pyranees
- Komondor
- Kuvasz

Mountain Dog breeds:

- St. Bernard
- Newfoundland
- Bernese Mountain Dog



Training Resources:

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** conducts various training classes. Sign up on our [Behavior & Training](#) page for the next available class series.

We also provide **Dog Training Instructors** and **Consultants** available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6280 or OhBeHAVE@MarinHumane.org.

Remember to license your dog (It's the LAW)! If your dog gets lost, a license tag on your dog's collar is the fastest way to reunite you and your dog. Even if your dog is microchipped, a license tag is immediately visible and doesn't require a scanning device to read. For more information about licensing, microchipping, and other services provided by **Marin Humane**, visit us at MarinHumane.org or stop by at 171 Bel Marin Keys Blvd, Novato, CA.

