

General Dog Care – ASPCA



Read on to find out how to make your new pooch feel like part of the family.

BACKGROUND

Experts say that dogs were domesticated between 12,000 and 25,000 years ago—and that all dogs evolved from the wolf. Since then, humans have selectively bred more than 400 breeds, ranging in size from four-pound teacup poodles to Irish wolfhounds, whose three-foot stature earns them the title of tallest canine. But the most popular pooches are non-pedigree—the one-of-a-kind dogs known as mixed-breeds.

COST

The annual cost of a small dog—including food, veterinary care, toys and license—is \$420. Make that \$620 for a medium dog and \$780 for a large pooch. This figure doesn't include capital expenses for spay/neuter surgery, collar and leash, carrier and crate.

Note: Make sure you have all your supplies (see our checklist) before you bring your dog home.

BASIC CARE

Feeding

- Puppies 8 to 12 weeks old need four meals a day.
- Feed puppies three to six months old three meals a day.
- Feed puppies six months to one year two meals a day.
- When your dog reaches his first birthday, one meal a day is usually enough.
- For some dogs, including larger canines or those prone to bloat, it's better to feed two smaller meals.

Premium-quality dry food provides a well-balanced diet for adult dogs and may be mixed with water, broth or canned food. Your dog may enjoy cottage cheese, cooked egg, fruits and vegetables, but these additions should not total more than ten percent of his daily food intake.

Puppies should be fed a high-quality, brand-name puppy food. Please limit "people food," however, because it can result in vitamin and mineral imbalances, bone and teeth problems and may cause very picky eating habits and obesity. Clean, fresh water should be available at all times, and be sure to wash food and water dishes frequently.

Exercise

Dogs need exercise to burn calories, stimulate their minds, and keep healthy. Exercise also tends to help dogs avoid boredom, which can lead to destructive behaviors. Supervised fun and games will satisfy many of your pet's instinctual urges to dig, herd, chew, retrieve and chase.

Individual exercise needs vary based on breed or breed mix, sex, age and level of health—but a couple of walks around the block every day and ten minutes in the backyard probably won't cut it. If your dog is a 6- to 18-month adolescent, or if she is an active breed or mixed-breed from the sporting, herding, hound or terrier groups, her requirements will be relatively high.

Grooming

You can help keep your dog clean and reduce shedding with frequent brushing. Check for fleas and ticks daily during warm weather. Most dogs don't need to be bathed more than a few times a year. Before bathing, comb or cut out all mats from the coat. Carefully rinse all soap out of the coat, or the dirt will stick to soap residue. [Click here](#) for more grooming tips.

Handling

Small dogs, sometimes referred to as "lap dogs," are the easiest to handle. To carry a puppy or small dog, place one hand under the dog's chest, with either your forearm or other hand supporting the hind legs and rump. Never attempt to lift or grab your puppy or small dog by the forelegs, tail or back of the neck. If you do have to lift a large dog, lift from the underside, supporting his chest with one arm and his rear end with the other.

Housing

Your pet needs a warm, quiet place to rest, away from all drafts and off the floor. A training crate is ideal. You may wish to buy a dog bed, or make one out of a wooden box. Place a clean blanket or pillow inside the bed. Wash the dog's bedding often. If your dog will be spending a lot of time outdoors, be sure she has access to shade and plenty of cool water in hot weather, and a warm, dry, covered shelter when it's cold.

Licensing and Identification

Follow your community's licensing regulations. Be sure to attach the license to your dog's collar. This, along with an ID tag and implanted microchip or tattoo, can help secure your dog's return should he become lost.

BEHAVIOR INFORMATION

Training

A well-behaved companion canine is a joy. But left untrained, your dog can cause nothing but trouble. Teaching your dog the basics—"Sit," "Stay," "Come," "Down," "Heel," "Off" and "Leave it"—will improve your relationship with both your dog and your neighbors. If you have a puppy, start teaching him his manners as soon as possible! Use little bits of food as a lure and reward. Puppies can be enrolled in obedience courses when they have been adequately vaccinated. Contact your local humane society or SPCA for training class recommendations.

You should always keep your puppy or dog on a leash in public. Just be sure your pet will come to you at all times whenever you say the word. A dog who is disobedient or aggressive is not ready to play with others.

HEALTH

Your dog should see the veterinarian for a full check-up, shots and a heartworm blood test every year, and immediately if he is sick or injured.

Dental Health

While many of us may object to our pet's bad breath, we should pay attention to what it may be telling us. Bad breath is most commonly an indication that your dog is in need of a dental check up. Dental plaque caused by bacteria results in a foul smell that requires professional treatment. After a professional cleaning, the teeth and gums may be maintained in a healthy state by brushing the teeth regularly, feeding a specially formulated dental diet and treats, and avoiding table scraps. Your veterinarian can give you more tips on minimizing dental disease and bad breath.

You can clean your canine's teeth with a dog toothpaste or a baking-soda-and-water paste once or twice a week. Use a child's soft toothbrush, a gauze pad or a piece of nylon pantyhose stretched over your finger.

Some dogs are prone to periodontal disease, a pocket of infection between the tooth and the gum. This painful condition can result in tooth loss and spread infection to the rest of the body. Veterinarians can clean the teeth as a regular part of your dog's health program.

Bad Breath

While bad breath caused by dental disease may not be too serious if caught early enough, some odors may be indicative of fairly serious, chronic problems. Liver or intestinal diseases may cause foul breath, whereas a sweet, fruity smell may be indicative of diabetes. If your dog's breath smells like ammonia or urine, kidney disease is a possibility. Any time you notice your pet has bad breath accompanied by other signs of ill health, such as loss of appetite, vomiting, weight loss, depression, excessive drinking or urinating, schedule a visit to the veterinarian.

Fleas and Ticks

Daily inspections of your dog for fleas and ticks during the warm seasons are important. Use a flea comb to find and remove fleas. There are several new methods of flea and tick control. Speak to your veterinarian about these and other options.

Heartworm

This parasite lives in the heart and is passed from dog to dog by mosquitoes. Heartworm infections can be fatal. Your dog should have a blood test for heartworm every spring—this is crucial for detecting infections from the previous year. A once-a-month pill given during mosquito season will protect your dog. If you travel south with your pet during the winter, your dog should be on the preventive medicine during the trip. In some warmer regions, veterinarians recommend preventive heartworm medication throughout the year.

Medicines and Poisons

Never give your dog medication that has not been prescribed by a veterinarian. For example, did you know that one regular-strength ibuprofen tablet can cause stomach ulcers in a ten-pound dog? Keep rat poison and other rodenticides away from your pet. If you suspect that your animal has ingested a poisonous substance, call your veterinarian or the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center for 24-hour animal poison information at (888) 426-4435.

Spaying and Neutering

Females should be spayed—the removal of the ovaries and uterus—and males neutered—removal of the testicles—by six months of age. Spaying before maturity significantly reduces the risk of breast cancer, a common and frequently fatal disease of older female dogs. Spaying also eliminates the risk of an infected uterus, a very serious problem in older females that requires surgery and intensive medical care. Neutering males prevents testicular and prostate diseases, some hernias and certain types of aggression.

For more on this important surgery, read our [top ten reasons to spay or neuter your pet](#).

Vaccinations

- Puppies should be vaccinated with a combination vaccine (called a “5-in-1”) at two, three and four months of age, and then once annually. This vaccine protects the puppy from distemper, hepatitis, leptospirosis, parvovirus, and parainfluenza. A puppy's vaccination program cannot be finished before four months of age.
- Rottweilers, Doberman pinschers and American Staffordshire terriers/pit bulls should be vaccinated until five months of age.
- If you have an unvaccinated dog older than four or five months, he will need a series of two vaccinations given two to three weeks apart, followed by a yearly vaccination.
- Do not walk your puppy or unvaccinated dog outside or let her walk or sit on the floor of an animal hospital until several days after her final vaccination.

Since laws vary around the country, contact a local veterinarian for information on rabies vaccination. In New York City, for example, the law requires all pets older than three months of age to be vaccinated for rabies. The first rabies vaccine must be followed by a vaccination a year later, and then every three years.

There are a variety of vaccines that may or may not be appropriate for your pet. Your veterinarian can tell you about them.

Please note, if your pet gets sick because he is not properly vaccinated, the vaccination should be given after your companion animal recovers.

Worms

Dogs are commonly exposed to worms and possible infestation—even in urban areas. Microscopic eggs produced by intestinal worms are passed in an infected dog's feces. Most puppies, even from healthy mothers in good homes, carry roundworms or hookworms.

The key to treatment is correct diagnosis. This will ensure that the medication is effective against the parasite your pet has. A de-wormer that eliminates roundworms, for example, will not kill tapeworms. Your veterinarian can best determine the culprit—and prescribe the appropriate medication. **ASPCA's website (aspca.org)**.