

## Dogs Are Our Best Friends and with Good Reason

Why are there so many dog lovers out there ? Dogs share our lives in a way that most other animals can't, and they're so commonplace that it's easy to take their faithful companionship for granted. The purpose of this article is to remind us of why we love dogs so much, to spare a few minutes and to spare a few words in praise of "man's best friend," the dog.

Dogs are friendly and they love human companionship. Whose ego would not be gratified at the sight of a happy dog who can't wait to greet you at the end of a hard day ? Your dog waits for you by the door, face smiling, mouth open and tail wagging, ready to dote on you, his best friend in the world.

Dogs are loyal and, as pack animals, they respond to the presence of a leader - you ! Dogs are eager to please you in any way they can. When you're feeling blue your dog will remain by your side silently comforting you. When you're happy and excited, your dog will leap about you and share in your joy.

Dogs are playful. They love physical activity such as going for walks, fetching sticks, leaping into ponds, and racing wildly to and fro. Dogs will join you for a jog or for a day in the park or even for an exuberant game of frisbee. Yet dogs can also be soft and cuddly and ready at anytime for a loving pat and a reassuring hug. They're affectionate and they're soothing to stroke, plus most dogs can also remain calm when necessary and be tolerant of small children who don't yet know how to be quiet or to behave gently around animals.

Dogs can be trained so that they can easily cohabitate with us in our human-built dwellings. They can also be trusted to act appropriately around other people and in public. Dogs can learn to save nature's call for outdoor walks, to walk on a leash when on public roads where cars lurk, and to sit and to stay whenever and wherever necessary.

The family dog is as much a part of daily life within a home as is any human household member. Our dogs are always there for us, day and night, sharing in every activity from breakfast time through a cozy evening spent watching TV. They can share both our indoor and many of our local outdoor activities, but that's not all. Dogs also play a big part in family life even when the family isn't at home. They can readily go places with us in cars, everywhere from a romp in the local park to a family vacation. Because they can travel with us, they can be a part of our lives in a way that most other companion animals can't. As dogs can participate in many of our most unusual experiences and outdoor adventures, they become forever associated with many of our most treasured memories.

Dogs, in all of their various shapes and sizes, are also beautiful animals to admire and to look at. From their big beautiful eyes and lovely faces, to their soft, sleek, shiny coats, to the tips of their joyfully wagging tails, dogs are a pleasure to behold. With so many different breeds to choose from, everyone can choose the dog whose appearance most appeals to them, whether large or small, short or long-muzzled, short-haired or long-haired or curly or straight-haired, with a muscular build or a slim build, with an elegant face or a comical face, and in any number of colors.

Each family can adopt the perfect dog to suit their taste and lifestyle by considering factors such as a dog's size and temperment. Does the family have a large fenced yard where a big dog can romp in safety, or a cramped apartment suitable for small dogs only ? Can the family pet care budget support a large dog with a large appetite ? Are there lots of flower beds that might be dug up and ruined by a breed such as a terrier ? Are there children in the house who require an extra gentle dog who'll tolerate the uninformed tail-pulling of a pre-schooler or the roughhousing of a ten year old ?

Does the family have the time available to give a dog all the love, attention, exercise and play that he deserves, or will he be alone all day ? How about two dogs to keep each other company when the human members of the family aren't around ? Perhaps a loveable mutt or two would be the ideal choices ! The local dog shelter is likely to be harboring many abandoned dogs who are sad and lonely and desperately in need of a second chance to find true happiness with a loving family.

Dogs give us the best of themselves: their love, loyalty, unconditional acceptance and affection, playfulness and companionship. In return, we owe them our best and the best care that we can give them, including a healthy, well-balanced diet, constant access to clean water and shelter from the hot sun or extreme cold, regular brushing and other grooming, ongoing veterinary care, plus annual vaccinations. Dogs should also be spayed or neutered, so that they do not contribute to the tragedy of the pet overpopulation problem.

A safe environment is, of course, a must. Indoors, be sure that cleaning products, medications, houseplants and other potential poisons are kept safely out of reach. Upper floor windows need secure grills or screens if they are to be opened. Heavy objects must not be left where they might fall on and injure dogs. Outdoor yards need secure fences if there are roads with cars nearby. (Please don't chain dogs outside and deny them their freedom of

movement.) Antifreeze and other poisons mustn't be allowed to leak where any animals might have access to them and try to drink them.

A leash should be used for walks where traffic poses a threat to safety. Don't skimp on daily exercise and provide lots of opportunities to run around and play but, if a little dog has short legs, remember to slow down and not force him to overwork his little legs in trying to keep up with your larger stride. Don't force dogs to hurry past every tree when out for a walk, either. Sometimes dogs just need to sniff, so don't rush them too much.

Above all else, dogs deserve gentle handling and an abundance of our time and attention. Love can make a dog's world go round as much as love makes our world go round. When we give our love freely to our dogs, we receive their love in return. Dogs can truly be man's and woman's and children's best friends, and we should feel honored to be theirs, as well.

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