

So You Want to Adopt a Golden Retriever

Golden Retrievers are easy dogs to fall head-over-heels in love with! When bred for the right temperament their outgoing, self-confident, friendly personalities, always glad-to-meet-you attitude, gentle, stable temperament and willingness to share unconditional love (and your lap) makes them one of the most sought-after breeds in the world. Not to mention that they are generally easy to train, especially when they are young, although older dogs learn well, too. Goldens are best trained using positive-reinforcements which enhance their general “eager to please” disposition. Goldens, originally bred as hunting dogs, a task which they still love and excel at, also make wonderful companions and family pets, as well as being ideal candidates for service dogs, therapy dogs, search and rescue dogs and working dogs... But, is this the right breed for you? Regardless of your attraction to a specific breed or style of dog, whether you want to rescue a dog from a shelter or rescue organization or buy a puppy from a reputable breeder, it is important to choose a dog that will fit into your lifestyle. Reputable breeders, backyard breeders, puppy mills and brokers will be discussed at length in our article [Choosing Your Golden Retriever Breeder](#).

Goldens are a medium to large, sturdy breed the AKC standard is set for females to be between 55-65 pounds and 21.5 to 22.5 inches in height at the withers, 60-80 pounds and 23 to 24 inches in height at the withers for males. They should have a broad skull and straight snout with a well defined stop. We affectionately call these Goldens “block heads”. With the increase of popularity of the breed, causing puppy mills and backyard breeders to create an abundance of sub-standard dogs, you may find Goldens with narrower skulls, resembling more like an Irish Setter’s head, often with a pronounced bone protruding somewhat at the top center of the skull. Unfortunately, as a Certified Pet Dog Trainer with 14 years professional experience, I see many of these types of Goldens that suffer from hyper-activity, lack of self-control and more behavior problems than his well-bred brothers. It is possible that a lot of the difference is due to lack of early training, socialization and sub-standard living conditions, but a major factor may also be the lack of proper breeding for health and temperament. Regardless, any deviation from the AKC breed standard which interferes with the breed’s purpose or is contrary to breed character is considered a fault in the breed. Goldens should have black or brown noses and look symmetrical. They should not be clumsy or overly-long in the leg. They should be sturdy, hearty, active and powerful. The Golden Retriever should have an eager to work attitude and be able to work in the adverse conditions for which it was bred, at home in both the water and mountainsides.

The Golden Retriever was originally bred by Lord Tweedmouth in the Scottish Highlands during the 1800’s. Lord Tweedmouth set out to create a superb retriever suited to the Scottish climate, terrain and available game. He crossed his original “Yellow Retriever” with the Tweed Water Spaniel, which is now extinct, but lived on his estate at the time. Later integrations of the Irish Setter, Bloodhound, and more Tweed Water Spaniel produced the retriever we know today. Members of the Sporting Group, Golden Retrievers were recognized by the American Kennel Club in 1925 and are one of the most popular breeds in America based on the registration rates received by the AKC.

Goldens are devoted, loyal, mild mannered and thrive on giving and receiving attention. But, they are also quite energetic with an endearing playful streak. They love human companionship, and therefore are not suited to those that cannot commit much time to their pet. Daily exercise is an important part of their care; these dogs must be provided with adequate room and time to play. Goldens love companionship and want to play with another dog or person and frequently will not play alone, waiting instead for a friend. They love to retrieve balls, throwing sticks or Frisbees. Along with giving them these types of opportunities to play, socializing with other dogs is important as are vigorous and long walks. Other activities your Golden Retriever would enjoy include swimming, hiking, jogging or biking. Some owners forget that challenging certain breeds with mental exercise is also an important aspect to their care. You can create fun games or interesting things for your dog to do that will keep them entertained and prevent them from becoming bored. Since Goldens are generally eager to please, they really enjoy having jobs, such as fetching the newspaper, retrieving dropped objects and carrying messages between family members to keep them busy and offers them the opportunity to gain approval from their owners.

Goldens usually get along well with children, strangers, and other pets. Since these dogs are such fast learners and highly intelligent, they are easy to train. They require positive obedience training, responding exceptionally well to clicker or marker-based training, with lots of praise and treats, but be careful, these dogs love to eat. Many Golden Retrievers suffer from obesity because of their love for food and owners willing to indulge them coupled with not enough exercise; so you have to be careful and watch how much you feed him. While a youthful Golden Retriever is not as prone to weight issues, it can be a concern for older dogs as they become less active.

It seems like these dogs are almost the perfect family pet and companion. Be aware that Golden Retrievers have a need to chew, both as puppies and adult dogs. Frequently giving them good things to chew on, such as stuffed, even frozen Kongs®, bully sticks, stuffed Windex (also called Moo Tubes), tendons, and raw bones, etc. help to satisfy their need to chew while keeping them entertained and teaching them appropriate behavior while protecting your furniture, plants and home from destruction.

New owners to the breed should also be aware of their grooming requirements. Goldens are a double-coated breed, with colors ranging from pale blonde to dark rust. Their coat is water-resistant and sheds seasonally. Goldens require a moderate amount of grooming which includes brushing their coats about twice a week. They might need more frequent grooming when they are shedding more heavily. Regular combing and brushing helps to remove dirt, pollens and allergens from their coats, reducing the frequency of baths needed. They also require straggly hairs as well as the hair around their bottoms trimmed for hygiene reasons. Dogs with floppy ears like the Golden should also have their ears cleaned regularly to reduce the risk of infection. The fur on their feet and under the pads should be trimmed neatly on a regular basis and their nails should be trimmed regularly

to prevent foot problems while reducing digging and the possibility of scratching up your floors.

There are few down-sides to having a Golden Retriever as a part of your family. Careful selection of the right breeder, good temperament, working with a quality, positive trainer, feeding a good diet while not over-feeding and providing sufficient quality exercise can eliminate most problems. However, the biggest downside of loving a Golden cannot be cured and that is simply that they do not live forever. The average age span of a Golden is about 10 to 12 years, barring any major medical issues. Reputable breeders are careful to avoid breeding known problems, but not everything can be avoided in careful breeding. Among the more serious health issues known to Golden Retrievers are certain cancers such as Osteosarcome and Lymphosarcoma. Hip dysplasia, Von Willebrand's disease (a bleeding disorder due to a defective or deficient blood clotting protein) eye and heart disorders can also be problems for Golden Retrievers. Some Goldens are also prone to skin allergies, which can sometimes be alleviated by finding the correct diet and eliminating the substance causing the allergy.

Hopefully your Golden, should you choose to adopt one, will be healthy and strong their entire life. Regardless, you will need to find a good licensed veterinarian who can get to know your dog personally, properly vaccinate your friend against known diseases and health threats common in your area, educate and guide you in their care and the importance of spaying or neutering your companion (so you do not become a backyard breeder yourself) while giving your dog great medical care for life.

For more information on choosing the right Golden Retriever, proper care, grooming and more, please feel welcome to enjoy our other articles online, our mini-course and e-book available at <http://www.SpectacularGoldens.com>. We hope you find the love, companionship and faithful friend that you seek! Good Luck!

By Gayle Ballinger, CPDT-KA

For more information on how you can build a better relationship with your dog, contact **Gayle Ballinger, CPDT-KA** at: info@PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com or **(206) 799-0521**. Visit her website at www.PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com or www.SpectacularGoldens.com

Gayle Ballinger is fiercely committed to guiding family pet owners everywhere to achieve a fun, trusting relationship with your pets so you can enjoy the type of unique relationship you originally dreamed of when you first considered adopting a companion animal. If you are looking for a proven professional who can guide you to address puppy raising and house training, settling a new rescue dog into your home or overcoming separation anxiety or aggression issues you've come to the right place.

With over 12 years of experience working with amazing clients with similar worries and concerns and guiding them to achieve remarkable success, Gayle's mission and commitment is to help you reach your specific goals and dreams of living happily with your dog and enjoying activities

together. Gayle's path to become a Certified Pet Dog Trainer became clear at an early age. One of her earliest memories is sitting on a curb in front of a market petting two Dobermans who were tied up to a mailbox waiting for their owner. Decades later, she still says "Hello!" to every dog she meets and passes on the street. .

Gayle approaches each of her clients with an open mind, she listens to your needs and desires, and then works with you to custom-tailor a training plan that will accomplish your goals while respecting your schedule and budget so that you can feel confident in engaging her to guide you through assessing, preventing and solving behavior problems. Over the years, Gayle's expertise has been honored with remarkable and notable accolades including being named Pasado's Volunteer of the Week, Vice Commodore of the Yacht Dogs Yacht Club, and being chosen as the Official Trainer for Brookside Elementary School's Special Education Animal Assistant Therapy Dog-in-Training, Brooke. Her work, articles and perspectives have been featured in the Shoreline Enterprise Newspaper, The Bothell/Kenmore Reporter, The Dog Service Network, The Yacht Dogs Yacht Club, Dogwise.com Forums, BoatUS Forums and as guest speaker to the Snohomish County C.E.R.T. (Community Emergency Response Team) Team Leaders group.

To engage Gayle to speak to your group, organization or community, email her at info@PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com or call at (206) 799-0521. Or enroll in one of her informal, family-oriented classes, behavioral consultations, workshops or private training programs or visit our Classes and Services page at <http://www.PawsitiveStepsSeattle.com> for scheduling and enrollment.