

About the Belgian Shepherd Dog

As the name implies, the Belgian Shepherd Dog is a herding dog. It is of medium size, robust but elegant. But don't let the elegance fool you, the breed was developed as a farm dog and loves to work, especially if it can work with its owner. Belgians are active dogs and do best when they have a job to do. They generally make poor couch potatoes and will find something inappropriate to do if they aren't given proper direction. The Belgian is intelligent and innately protective. Early positive socialization and consistent training are essential to the development of a well-adjusted adult.

There are four varieties of Belgians, each differing only in coat type and/or color. The varieties are the Groenendael with its long black coat, the Tervuren with its long coat in fawn with a black mask and charcoaling, the Malinois with its short fawn coat, black mask and charcoaling and the Laekenois with its fawn rough coat.

In deciding if a Belgian is the right dog for you, please consider the following:

- Will your dog live indoors as a part of your family? Like all dogs, Belgians are social animals. They need to interact with you and your family as companions. Many, if not most, will follow their owners from room to room just for the pleasure of being with them. If kept outside, due to their high energy level, they will resort to inappropriate and often destructive activities such as digging, chewing, barking, scratching at doors and screens, etc. Adding a second dog to keep the first company is not a solution for this. It is important that all family members are supportive of having a large dog living in the house.
- How much time do you have to spend participating in activities with your dog? Belgians are active and need daily exercise, more than many breeds. They need a job to do. They excel in such activities as obedience, agility, herding, search and rescue, and in assistance and therapy work. Can you commit to spending the time necessary to train your dog in activities that will give the dog a purpose?
- Belgians can be pushy and many will take control of your household if you let them. Are you capable of asserting the role of benevolent pack leader in your home? Are all other human members of your household able to maintain a leadership position with the dog?
- Many Belgians have high prey drive. Do you have the experience in working with dogs to keep this drive in check? Do you have small pets such as rabbits, gerbils, hamsters or ferrets? Can you live with the consequences if your Belgian injures or kills a rabbit in your yard?
- Can you commit to keeping a Belgian for the next 10 to 15 years, no matter what? Dog ownership is a responsibility. It takes time and commitment. Shelters and rescue organizations are overwhelmed with the large numbers of dogs whose owners have given them up for no more reason than they became an inconvenience. Oftentimes keeping a dog is inconvenient, but to those who truly appreciate the lifetime of love and companionship they give, the commitment is a small price to pay.

These are just some of the considerations to be made before buying a Belgian. An honest assessment will determine if a Belgian (or any breed of dog) is right for you. If after considering these questions, you feel that a Belgian is the right breed for you, we strongly recommend that you then talk to breeders and owners of Belgians for more information that is specific to your situation. The club's secretary can help put you in contact with Belgian owners near you and throughout the U.S. Additional information can be obtained by contacting the United Belgian Shepherd Dog Association at www.ubsda.com.