

Bullmastiffs:

Important information for prospective
owners



The American Bullmastiff Association

<http://www.bullmastiff.us>

Brief History of the Bullmastiff



The known history of the Bullmastiff begins about the year 1860 in England. It is probable that the story of the breed is really centuries old.

The Bullmastiff was bred to aid gamekeepers in protecting the game on large English estates. Poaching on the estates was an expensive problem for the landowners, and it was the gamekeeper's duty to catch the thieves. Gamekeepers needed a dog that could track quietly, cover short distances quickly, and pin and hold poachers without mauling them. Gamekeepers experimented with several breeds, looking to the mastiff, who was too slow, and then the bulldog, who was at the time a more ferocious dog than he is today — *too* ferocious. Out of these breeds, the bullmastiff was born. He combined the best of both breeds for the job required of him. He is now primarily a family companion with a calm, dependable disposition when properly trained and socialized.

The Bullmastiff was accepted as a recognized breed of the American Kennel Club in October, 1933.

General Appearance and Size



Bullmastiffs are large, powerfully built, but agile dogs. They have short coats that come in fawn, red, or brindle shades, and have a black mask. Their large heads are a striking feature, with keen, alert, intelligent expressions. Males measure 25 to 27" at the withers, and weigh up to 130 lbs. Females are 24 to 26" at the withers and weight up to 120 lbs.

Temperament of the Bullmastiff



“Fearless and confident, yet docile, the dog combines the reliability, intelligence, and willingness to please required in a dependable family companion and protector.”

The Bullmastiff Breed Standard

Bullmastiffs are strong-willed, but sensitive dogs who need a firm but loving hand. Consistency is the key word when dealing with this breed. They back their will with a tremendous physical strength, so early training and socialization is vital to a well-behaved family companion. That being said a Bullmastiff is not for everyone. The commitment to training and socializing a Bullmastiff puppy is great and will require an honest effort and understanding of or willingness to learn accepted training methods.

Guarding Instincts

Most bullmastiffs are natural guardians of their home and families. No guard training is necessary for a bullmastiff to react appropriately if his family is threatened. However, unless that threat occurs, you may never see that side of your bullmastiff. Because silence was a virtue for bullmastiffs guarding estates, most bullmastiffs are not big barkers.

Bullmastiffs and children

In general, bullmastiffs do very well with children. They have a high pain tolerance, and are not likely to snap in reaction to a pulled tail or tugged ear. *It is imperative*, however, that bullmastiffs be taught to respect children, and that children be taught to respect bullmastiffs. Remember that these are large dogs, and what is meant to be a playful swat with a paw could knock a small child over easily. **Never** leave a child unattended with your bullmastiff, or any dog. A Bullmastiff’s size should certainly be considered when children are involved. Accidents can and do happen. A Bullmastiff simply turning their head quickly to one side can produce a fall or damage to a small child. It is also important

to keep in mind that all dogs are individuals, and no blanket statement applies to all Bullmastiffs. Raise your dog appropriately, and use common sense. A Bullmastiff is not a Golden Retriever or a Beagle. You cannot allow them to raise themselves. They are pack animals and will find their natural place in the pack if left to natural processes. That place may be at the top of the pecking order instead of below younger family members if left unchecked.



Bullmastiffs and other animals

Most bullmastiffs can be taught to share a home with cats, though some with a high prey drive never seem to lose the temptation to give chase. Other dogs are another matter. Because the breed was developed to work independently, and to be wary of canine intruders, bullmastiffs *are frequently* aggressive toward other dogs. In most cases, males and females will get along, but a bullmastiff with another dog of the same gender (any size/breed of dog) can spell trouble. The dogs may do well with one another for years and then some small trigger sets them off and they will be enemies for life. If you share your home with a bullmastiff and another dog of the same gender, you must be prepared to possibly deal with a fight breaking out among them. A fight involving a bullmastiff almost always involves extensive, expensive veterinary care, and you must separate the dogs from one another for the remainder of their lives as a precautionary measure. Some dogs can be socialized to a degree of cohabitation after an incident but, this is the exception to the rule and not easily or generally accepted by the bullmastiff.



Trainability

Bullmastiffs, it must be said, are independent thinkers. In general, they want to please their owners, but they rarely see the value in repeating the same actions again and again. For this reason, training a bullmastiff to do obedience work must be approached differently than training many other breeds. However, many bullmastiff owners enjoy a variety of activities with their dogs. Conformation, obedience, agility, tracking, and carting are all activities in which bullmastiffs can excel. Bullmastiffs can make excellent therapy dogs and can bring a smile to the face of those they visit.

Living Environment

Bullmastiffs are best as family companions who live indoors with their loved ones. Despite their large size and tough-guy good looks, a bullmastiff can have a very soft temperament where loved ones are concerned. They are happiest when they are spending time with their family, and are best suited as indoor pets. Most bullmastiffs don't require a lot of exercise, and a brief walk or two, or a romp in the yard may be all they need. You do not have to have a large yard to keep a bullmastiff; they can live happily in an apartment with a few daily walks. Be aware that bullmastiffs are very intolerant of extreme heat. Because of their shortened muzzles, you must take care to be sure they do not overheat on warm days, and restrict activities to the coolest hours of the day. Bullmastiffs should *never* be allowed to roam the neighborhood or surrounding areas unattended. They are guard dogs and as their territory expands so will their commitment to protecting that area from other dogs and people.

Grooming

It is often said that the bullmastiff is a "wash and wear" breed. Their short coats don't require a lot of care, though they will certainly benefit from a quick daily brushing to remove dead hair and keep their coats shiny. Like all dogs, their ears and teeth must be cleaned regularly, and their toenails should be kept short. Neglect in these areas can and often produce ear infections, flattened pasterns, splayed feet and expensive tooth removal

Health and Longevity

Dogs are subject to health problems, and Bullmastiffs are no exception. Common health issues are cancer, hip and elbow dysplasia, torn anterior cruciate ligaments, bloat, sub-aortic stenosis, skin and coat problems, thyroid problems and entropion. You can learn more about those issues and what the American Bullmastiff Association Health and Research Committee is doing to learn about these problems on the ABA webpage (see Resources, below).

Cost of Ownership

When you are thinking of adding a bullmastiff to your family, please take into consideration not only the initial cost of purchasing a puppy (average current prices for puppies range from \$1000 to \$1800), but also the cost of health care for bullmastiffs. Remember that all dogs need annual veterinary visits, and that even routine medication, such as those to prevent fleas and ticks, are very expensive for such a large dog. If your dog should need special care for more serious problems, costs can easily spiral into the thousands of dollars. Medical costs associated with large breed dogs are higher primarily due to size in general. Bigger does mean more in this area. Other costs to consider include the purchase of quality food, toys and supplies. A teething puppy requires many items to occupy their time otherwise you may find your favorite table lacking a leg or the TV remote in many tiny pieces.

Where to Get a Bullmastiff

Before you add a bullmastiff to your family, you must decide if you want a puppy or an adult. Puppies are a huge commitment – you will need to spend many months training the puppy, and will need to endure the extra energy and mischievousness a puppy will grace you with. If a puppy is too daunting, consider an older dog. Many wonderful dogs are available through bullmastiff rescue. These dogs frequently find themselves in rescue through no fault of their own: they are the product of a divorce, or perhaps their former owners are having a baby and felt they no longer had time for their dog. Too often warnings of proper socialization and training have been ignored. Sometimes, the former owner finds himself financially incapable of caring for the dog. These dogs can make wonderful companions in the proper environment.

There are many benefits to adopting a rescue dog:

- the dogs are already spayed/neutered when they are adopted,
- because they are usually full-grown, you have a better idea of what you are getting in terms of size and temperament
- adoption fees are much smaller than the cost of a new puppy
- Most important, you know you are giving a deserving dog a forever home, and the dog knows it, too. The bond between a rescue dog and their new owner is very strong.

For more information on rescuing a bullmastiff, see the “Resources” section, below.

If you are still interested in a puppy or have additional questions about bullmastiffs, please contact one of our breed mentors. These are people who have long been involved in the breed, who can help you with many questions you have about bullmastiffs. There are numerous books available but sometimes having a real person that you can contact regarding your dog is comforting and helpful. Don't expect everyone in the bullmastiff world to drop what they are doing and help you simply because you own the same breed of dog. Many will offer suggestions but a reputable breeder will know much about the lines of dogs in their care and can offer useful information. Make sure the person you buy your puppy from will be there for you. To many times breeders are more interested in selling puppies than providing "service after the sale" so to speak. Always make sure you know where your puppy is coming from. If a breeder will not let you see their home or kennel then that is not the place to purchase your next family companion.

For more information

WWW.BULLMASTIFF.US, the homepage of The American Bullmastiff Association. In addition to information about club activities and how to become a member, you will find information about the breed and about bullmastiff rescue, as well as application forms for rescue.

Journals

BULLMASTIFF BULLETIN, published three times a year by the American Bullmastiff Association, is available for purchase for \$15.

Books

THE BULLMASTIFF: PEERLESS PROTECTOR, by Jack Shastid and Gerry Roach.

EVERYONE'S GUIDE TO THE BULLMASTIFF, by Carol H. Beans

RAISING THE BULLMASTIFF, by Mona Webb

BULLMASTIFFS TODAY, by Lyn Pratt.

THE MASTIFF AND BULLMASTIFF HANDBOOK, by Douglas Oliff.