

## Dog Fancy Profile Labrador Retriever

### Labrador Retriever in Brief

Country of origin: Canada.

Group: Sporting (AKC);

Gun Dog (UKC).

Life span: 12 to 14 years.

Color: Black, yellow, or chocolate.

Coat: Short, straight, dense, weatherproof coat, sometimes with a slight wave down the back.

Grooming: Brush weekly.

Height/weight: Males, 22 1/2 to 24 1/2 inches, 65 to 80 pounds; females, 21 1/2 to 23 1/2 inches, 55 to 70 pounds.

Trainability: High.

Activity level: High in puppies. As adults, moderate to high.

Known health problems: Hip dysplasia, elbow dysplasia, retinal folds, progressive retinal atrophy (degeneration and loss of retinal tissue), epilepsy, hypothyroidism, allergies, and exercise-induced collapse.

Best home: Inside with family.

Good with children: Yes, with adult supervision.

Good with other pets: Yes.

National breed club: Labrador Retriever Club Inc. [www.thelabradorclub.com](http://www.thelabradorclub.com)

Rescue: Labrador Retriever Club Rescue [www.thelabradorclub.com/rescue](http://www.thelabradorclub.com/rescue)

### Labrador Retriever

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#### Labrador Retriever: American Classic

A lovable nature and outgoing personality make the Labrador Retriever a family favorite.

Eve Adamson

Clue lives in Labrador Retriever heaven. Her Granbury, Texas, backyard has a lake, and every morning the yellow Labrador Retriever barrels down the stairs and leaps into the water for a swim. "If she can find a dead fish, nothing pleases her more than delivering breakfast to me," says her owner, breeder Mary Feazell. "Of course, she is doing what she was bred to do, so I say 'thank you,' and when she's not looking, I drop the fish in a covered garbage pail," Feazell confesses.

#### Evolution of a best friend

The Labrador Retriever evolved in Newfoundland — not the neighboring island of Labrador — as the smaller of two breeds that aided working fisherman (the Newfoundland was the larger). He had to be sturdy, strong, healthy, and cold-tolerant enough to swim through frigid waters, sometimes breaking through ice with his chest. Labrador Retrievers worked long hours and were highly attuned to the needs of their working human companions.

"I think people have to understand the origins of this dog to understand what Labrador Retrievers are really like," says Marianne Foote of Livermore, Calif., director of the Labrador Retriever Club Inc. "This dog provided real assistance to the people living and working in Newfoundland, hauling wood, pulling carts, retrieving fish escaped from nets, and pulling nets to the boats when the fisherman lost them. You can see how strong and determined these dogs had to be."

But few could deny the Labrador Retriever's other great skill: being a family companion. Today fewer people work with their Labrador Retrievers, and more keep them as family pets. The Labrador Retriever's particular intuitive affinity for humans makes him an ideal service, guide, and therapy dog. Many higher-energy Labrador Retrievers excel at drug sniffing, search and rescue, and performance events, such as agility, flyball, and hunt tests.

Over the past century in America, some kennels have bred for the best Labrador Retriever to compete in the show ring, as described in the written breed standard, while others have worked toward the best Labrador Retriever to compete in performance events. Both should have friendly, outgoing temperaments and an instinct for retrieving. Show dog lines may tend to be more laid-back, while field dog lines may tend to have higher energy and a more intense drive to work. Much depends on the individual line, so talk to your breeder about his or her breeding priorities, which should focus primarily on good health and sound temperament.

Whether black, yellow, or chocolate (all colors can come from the same litter), the Labrador Retriever has been the most popular American Kennel Club breed in the United States for 15 years running. It has almost three times as many registrations as the No. 2 dog, the Golden Retriever.

#### Life with Labs

Understanding the Labrador Retriever's need for work, activity, and human companionship is essential to living successfully with one. The breed's original rugged determination and retrieving instinct still characterize the Labrador Retriever today. "You just can't expect this breed to lie in a corner all day," Foote says. "The Labrador's origins are to work in partnership with people."

As puppies, Labrador Retrievers can be a real challenge. "From birth until 2, Labs are rambunctious, and quite frankly, they can be a pain in the neck," Feazell says. "If you are expecting your Lab puppy to be just like your Aunt Millie's 8-year-old Lab standing there with her tail gently wagging, you are going to be unpleasantly surprised."

Labrador Retrievers need early training and lots of human interaction to reach their full potential. Because they are so food-motivated and eager to please, Labrador Retrievers are easy to train. Just keep a pocketful of treats, advises Labrador Retriever breeder Claire White-Peterson of North Stonnington, Conn. Adds Feazell, "Get your obedience training in before the dog is stronger than you are!"

All puppies need to chew, but Labrador Retrievers in particular need heavy-duty chewing time. "This is a mouth-oriented breed. Chewing is a tension reliever, and even my adult dogs will grab a toy and chew very vigorously for a few minutes after eating," Foote says. Keep acceptable chew toys readily accessible.

The Labrador Retriever coat may be short, but Labrador Retrievers shed a lot. "Sometimes people tell me they heard Labs don't shed. I respond, 'That's very amusing,'" White-Peterson says. "You have to have a very good vacuum cleaner."

Labrador Retrievers are among the best breeds for families with children, although very small children could get knocked over by an exuberant puppy or a big wagging tail. "I am my Labs' best friend until my nieces and nephews show up. Then I don't exist anymore," says White-Peterson, who trained her 4-year-old niece to stand on a chair and say "No! Down!" to the excited crew of Labrador Retrievers.

Labrador Retrievers typically like other Labs — and many other dogs, too. But when it comes to birds and small animals, the hunting instinct kicks in, so pet owners must protect these pets.

When White-Peterson took her chocolate Labrador Retriever, Madeline, to earn her hunting certificate at the tender age of 6 months, the show dog had no training in hunting. Yet, when she heard the first gunshot, it was "as if suddenly she knew what she was bred to do," White-Peterson says. "She dashed out on command, found the bird, brought it right back. It was truly in her blood."

Guarding isn't in the Labrador Retriever's blood, however. "They will hold the flashlight for the burglar. They don't normally make good guard dogs, although there are exceptions," says Feazell, remembering her black Labrador Retriever, Dominic, who long ago cornered the milkman on top of the washing machine.

#### Healthy and long-lived

Labrador Retrievers can be prone to orthopedic problems such as hip and elbow dysplasia (degenerative joint diseases), but feeding puppies the right way can make a big difference in your Labrador Retriever's future bone and joint health. Talk to your breeder or veterinarian about large-breed puppy foods for slower bone growth, to build denser, healthier bones and stronger, deeper joints. "Give them good food, and you will spend less time and money at the veterinarian's office," White-Peterson says.

The food-loving Labrador Retriever can also pack on pounds, so monitor portions and limit treats. "This breed is genetically programmed to live on very little food," Foote says. An overweight Labrador Retriever is more prone to arthritis, heart disease, and other health problems. If you can feel your Labrador Retriever's ribs easily but you can't see them, your Labrador Retriever is in good shape.

Because Labrador Retrievers originally come from the chilly North, they don't tolerate heat. When outside in warm weather, Labrador Retrievers must always have access to fresh, clean water. "Give them a trough or a kid's swimming pool, anything to cool them off, and be sure they always have shade," Feazall says.

#### Lab for life

Sure, Labrador Retriever puppies can be a challenge, but this breed bonds strongly to its people. Davy Crockett, an

80-pound chocolate Labrador Retriever, fancies himself a lap dog and tries to perch on White-Peterson whenever she sits down to read. "When I tell him to get off me, he looks at me like, 'What do you mean? How could you not want me on your lap?'"

Foote adds, "Labs just love to be with you and want to do whatever you ask them to do. They are forgiving about training mistakes, and they have a wonderful love of life." While on a trip to Seattle, Foote's black Labrador Retriever, Willie, broke his leash and dashed off. "My husband Lynn ran after him hollering, 'Willie! Willie!', but he didn't have to look far," Foote says. The sociable Labrador Retriever had found a concert in the park and was sitting happily in the audience sharing a sandwich with a friendly stranger.

"You just have to get through those first two years, and you'll have that Lab for life," White-Peterson says. "They become soul mates so easily," Fezell says. "They just slide right into your heart and take up residence."

Eve Adamson is a DOG FANCY contributing editor and the author of over 30 books, including Labrador Retrievers for Dummies (For Dummies, 2000, \$15.99), co-authored with Joel Walton.

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