

America's Best Dog Parks 2007

These 10 canine playgrounds make tails wag.

Maureen Kochan

Americans love their dog parks. And it's no wonder — dog parks serve up plenty of perks for both dogs and dog lovers, including companionship, exercise, fresh air, and a sense of community.

If there isn't one near you, just wait. In the almost three decades since the first dog park swung open its double gates (one each in San Francisco and New York City claim to be the nation's oldest), more than 700 such parks have sprung up across the nation.

For this year's installment of DOG FANCY's Best Dog Parks contest, we set out to identify reader-nominated parks with the best amenities for both dogs and owners. And boy, the parks did not disappoint! We found wading pools, showers, agility playgrounds — and enough social and educational events to keep dog lovers happy all year.

The best all-around dog park? The honor goes to year-old Cosmo Dog Park in Gilbert, Ariz., for its outstanding dog- and owner-friendly features. Nine other parks from Seattle to Fort Lauderdale also scored major points for first-rate facilities.

And the winners are...

BEST DOG PARK 2007

Cosmo Dog Park
2502 E. Ray Road
Gilbert, Ariz.
www.ci.gilbert.az.us/parks/popups/cosmo-park.cfm

Gilbert was recently named one of America's best places to live by Money magazine. And judging by Cosmo Dog Park, it's also a pretty fine place for dogs to live. Cosmo sits on four acres just outside of Phoenix, and boasts a bunch of tail-wagging amenities, including a man-made swimming area with a dock for jumping, a dog beach, and exercise equipment complete with climbing obstacles and tubes. Even the drinking fountains have flair — one is shaped like a fire hydrant, and sits in the middle of a small wading pool so dogs can splash around as they quench their thirst. Park planners also threw dog owners a bone: Four covered patios with benches and tables provide relaxing spots to escape the hot desert sun.

Not surprisingly, the buzz was so great before the park's July 2006 opening that town officials reported curious dog lovers climbing over and under the fencing to get an early peek. And who could blame them? Says park regular Cynthia Barnes Pharr, Ph.D., who takes her Labrador Retriever Keeper to Cosmo several times a week, "You really get the sense that the park was built with dogs in mind."

BEST SAFETY INNOVATION

Bark Park at Snyder Park
3299 S.W. 4th Ave.
Fort Lauderdale, Fla.
<http://ci.ftlaud.fl.us/cityparks/snyder/barkpark/features.htm>

Scuffles between dogs can happen at the dog park when you least expect it. Most owners are great at quieting their dogs or removing them altogether when it just isn't the right day for off-leash play. At Bark Park at Snyder Park in Fort Lauderdale, a full-time attendant monitors dogs and dog owners during park hours to ensure a safe and fun day for all guests. Dog parkers pay a small entry fee or purchase an annual pass to help support park operations.

BEST AMENITIES FOR PEOPLE

Point Isabel Regional Shoreline Dog Park
1 Isabel St., Richmond, Calif.
www.ebparcs.org/parks/ptisable.htm

After hours of romping in San Francisco Bay at the Point Isabel Regional Shoreline Dog Park, dirty dogs and dog lovers

can head to the park's very own dog washing and retail shop, Mudpuppy's Tub & Scrub. Owners can opt for full-service or do-it-yourself dog baths or browse a retail area brimming with toys, treats, and supplies. Hungry? No problem. Try Mudpuppy's Sit and Stay Café, located next door to Mudpuppy's and featuring treats for your dog and you, including smoothies, soups, ice cream, and Mudpuppy's famous Road House Chili.

BEST SMALL DOG AREA

Bear Dog Park
1575 Pleasant Grove Blvd.
Roseville, Calif.
www.rosevilledog.org/bear_dog_park1.htm

Just because some dogs are small doesn't mean they don't need ample space to stretch their legs. At Bear Dog Park in northern California, they certainly get their fair share. The fenced area for small dogs measures just under an acre of prime California real estate, with a walking trail around the perimeter. Doggie showers and lights for nighttime visits complete the small-dog bliss.

BEST AGILITY AREA

Friends Forever Dog Park
966 Rudy Road, Freeport, Ill.
www.petfinder.com/shelters/friendsforever.html

What could make a dog happier than a fenced, nine-acre dog park complete with a pool to romp in during long, hot summers? At the Friends Forever Dog Park, located in northern Illinois, a fenced area filled with agility equipment coaxes the inner athletes out of dogs. The equipment, which is also used by park operator Friends Forever Humane Society for training and exercising homeless dogs, includes an A-frame, dog walk, weave poles, and jumps. **BEST HUMAN**

ACCOMMODATIONS

Robert L. Nelson Dog Park
60376 C.R. 13, Goshen, Ind.
www.animalaidclinicsouth.com/dogpark.htm

Most dog parks focus on the comfort of canine guests. At the Robert L. Nelson Dog Park in northern Indiana, park planners also considered human comfort by erecting a pavilion with an A-line roof to shade guests from sun and rain. Plastic benches and a concrete floor tame mud. The location, smack-dab in the middle of the fenced park, allows owners to keep a close eye on their dogs.

BEST DOG BEACH

Alum Creek Dog Park
3615 S. Old State Road
Lewis Center, Ohio
www.alumcreekdogpark.com

Alum Creek Dog Park proves a dog park doesn't need to occupy a coveted site near an ocean or lake to provide dogs with a fun day at the beach. The Alum Creek Dog Park sits on a prime four-acre spot along the shores of a large reservoir in Alum Creek State Park, where gently rolling fields and woodlands provide an outdoor oasis that brims with recreational opportunities year-round, just minutes from Ohio's capital city of Columbus. A picturesque river rock dog beach — built with volunteer funds — beckons water-loving dogs to take a dip.

BEST TRAIL

Warren G. Magnuson Dog Park
7400 Sand Point Way NE, Seattle, Wash.
www.seattle.gov/parks/magnuson/ola.htm

So it rains in Seattle. A lot. But that doesn't stop thousands of dogs from visiting Warren G. Magnuson Dog Park, located along the shores of Lake Washington. Dogs can romp in the water or meander down a picturesque trail that snakes through the nine-acre park. But this isn't just any trail. The wide, winding footpath is composed of compact gravel to keep down mud, and level enough to be wheelchair-accessible. Several open areas along the trail invite lingering, and changes of scenery around every corner make the journey a special treat for human visitors.

BEST WORKSHOPS

Kenton Paw Park



3950 Madison Pike, Covington, Ky.
www.kentonpawpark.com

Socialization for both dogs and dog owners is a top goal for any dog park. But at Kenton Paw Park, educating dog owners is also a major priority. Check out the park's packed calendar, and alongside such fun events as doggie pool parties and dinner events, you'll find listings for informational workshops on subjects like dog behavior, agility, and dog care. Three local veterinarians donate their time to head up the popular classes.

BEST SOCIAL EVENTS

Cedar Lane Dog Park
235 Cedar Lane
Ossining, N.Y.
www.ossiningdogpark.com

Come Christmas morning, when most people are tearing into gifts, you'll find dozens of devoted Cedar Lane Dog Park regulars sharing piping-hot cider, hot chocolate, and muffins while their dogs play. Now that's what we call dedication! Other fun events at this Hudson Valley dog park include an annual dog swim and the "Unleashed Party," where guests mingle sans dogs. But to help partygoers better recognize each other, organizers ask attendees to bring along a picture of their canine companions.

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