

Popular Dogs: Beagles

Life with a Beagle is always an adventure.

By Nikki Moustaki

When most people think Beagle, they don't often think cunning, smart-as-a-fox and twice as naughty, but those big brown eyes and that innocent look are deceptive. Beagles are laid-back, affectionate and can even be a little aloof -- but dumb? No way. Still, most Beagle owners agree that the nose is the most intelligent part of their canine pal's anatomy.

Energy to Spare

A Beagle's energy level generally changes as the dog ages. Beagle puppies are full of vigor, always ready for an exhausting romp. Teenaged and adult Beagles have a lot of stamina -- after all, they're bred for hunting and chasing game. Older Beagles can fatigue easily, but that's true of nearly every breed.

The Stubborn Nose

OK, the nose itself isn't stubborn, but it's behind some of the Beagle's seemingly stubborn behavior. Once a Beagle happens upon a scent, you'll be hard-pressed to regain its interest in anything else.

"My husband once chased Shelley for five miles through the woods after she got on the scent of a deer," says Alice Moser of Shavertown, Pennsylvania. "She screeched and howled the entire time, so it wasn't hard for him to follow her, but she would not come to him, no matter how many times he called her. She was focused solely on that scent. That was the last time she was let off the leash outside the confines of our fenced yard!"

Be careful any time your Beagle is roaming freely. Not only do Beagles enjoy taking off after wild game, they're bred to be followed by their human companions -- in other words, running after the dog only fuels the chase.

Most Beagle owners soon learn that their dogs not only can't be trusted off leash, but that they are even drawn to escaping the house or yard to track game. "Chester is an escape artist -- he'll dart out the door at the first sign of another dog or a squirrel," says Marta Kane of Massapequa Park, New York. When their nose leads them on a hunting trail, it's often hard to divert their attention.

The nose also leads to thievery. A new Beagle owner soon learns to put food away quickly. "If you have a sandwich in your hand and you're not paying attention, that sandwich will be gone," Pinkney says. "Don't be persuaded by their sweet faces. I call Belle the 'Queen of the Mile' -- if you give her an inch, she'll take a mile."

Be the Rabbit

You have to take a kind of Zen outlook on training a Beagle. If you want your Beagle's attention, you have to be more exciting and more rewarding than the proverbial rabbit (or squirrel or sandwich, whatever the case).

"Training a Beagle can be a challenge to the novice trainer," says Carol Herr, a professional handler and Beagle breeder from Summerfield, Florida. "They think all the time, and they get bored easily, but most trainers think they're just being stubborn. I find that they're no more stubborn than any other breed. Sometimes their noses get them into trouble, but because they're so food motivated, you can train them to respond to food. That's why all my Beagles think their middle name is 'cookie.'"

"You must have very smelly treats to train your Beagle so it will focus on you," says Nicki Puckett of Virginia Beach, Virginia. "If you can convince your Beagle that you're the bearer of good, smelly things, you can convince it to do almost anything for you -- Beagles are noses with legs."

Kids Stuff

A big upside to owning a Beagle is the breed's high tolerance for children and their antics. This family-oriented breed takes nearly everything a kid can dish out. "Beagles are wonderful with children," Herr says. "It has often been said, 'All little boys should have a Beagle as a pet.' The only thing I worry about with small children is a Beagle puppy getting up in their faces, because Beagle puppies have a tendency to lick a lot. Beagles also have soft, fairly long ears that seem to have an attraction for young children, so children need to learn not to pull on the ears."

If you have kids, remind them that any food in their hands is fair game for the chowhound in their life. A small child might become upset if the dog steals his or her treat. Conversely, teach the child not to take things away from the dog, and to be gentle and compassionate with it.

"My two Beagles are wonderful with kids," says Ursula E. Lehman of Hudson, Ohio. "Blade was a pup when my godchild, Karlie, was just a few months old, and he would pop over to her and just love her to pieces with kisses galore. He would tolerate her pulling his ears and tail. As she got older, he had to tolerate even more."

The Beagle's temperament is legendary, and its reputation is made more of fact than fiction -- this dog really is a great family member and a gentle, loving companion. Sure, the breed's obedience skills might leave something to be desired, but many people have managed to put obedience and agility titles onto their Beagles. All this breed needs is a patient owner with a handful of liver snacks.

Next Step: [10 Reasons to Own a Beagle](#)