

Popular Dogs: Golden Retrievers

Discover the breed characteristics of the Golden Retriever.

Virginia Parker Guidry

Like Labrador Retrievers, Goldens are young at heart and remain puppyish for several years. The Golden is a late bloomer, maturing at about 3 years old. "Typically, sporting breeds like Labradors and Goldens don't fully mature mentally until they're about 3, 3 1/2," says Kee. "And a lot of people aren't willing to wait that long. Too bad, because there's quite a reward at the end of that time if you've done the things you need to do."

That puppyish approach to life isn't necessarily bad, though. Enthusiasts enjoy it. Be that as it may, it does affect training. Goldens love to play, and they may not take lessons seriously.

"Sometimes they think this is a play period and we're not training with a purpose," says Kee. "So, you've got to kind of have what I call a velvet glove on your iron fist." That is, emphasize fun and teamwork; correct, but don't punish. Then, the owner obtains a training goal and, "the dog thinks it's fun."

Goldens are "mouthy" dogs (a natural instinct that makes them great retrievers), and are frequently obsessed with carrying something in their mouths. To satisfy this urge, keep plenty of toys on hand. "I recommend having lots of stuffed toys around; tennis balls, you've got to have a supply of tennis balls," says Rinehart.

Your TrainingWhen it comes to training resources, today's Golden owners have it made. There are dog clubs, professional trainers, books, magazines, videos, obedience classes and clinics and the Internet, all of which can provide owners with training information and guidance.

But first, says Kee, know what you want. "Know your goals before you start out," he says. "If your goal is to be the national obedience champion, well that's certainly going to color the way you're going to approach training. If your goal is to have a wonderful companion, your priorities are going to change."

If you're more serious-minded about training, enthusiasts highly recommend finding a mentor, someone experienced in the type of competition in which you're interested. For example, if agility is your ambition, locate Golden club members involved in the sport. Seek out an individual who is knowledgeable and willing to help you.

No matter the type of training, work with others. "Train with other people. Don't train in a vacuum," says Kee. It's helpful, efficient, you'll learn more quickly and it's a great way to meet interesting people. "There's an interesting side to all this; that is, dog people are fun. Golden people are a riot. They're a lot of fun. That's been my experience."

The benefits of a well-schooled Golden Retriever-trustworthy companion and successful competitor-are numerous. But one of the best reasons for training can come from a next-door neighbor.

Says Kee, "I can't tell you how neat it is, how good it makes you feel, when somebody knocks on your door and says, 'Can my kids see your dogs? You have such well-trained dogs. I want them to be introduced to a well-trained dog.'"