

Shih Tzu

Discover the breed characteristics of the Shih Tzu.

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It's easy to fall in love with a Shih Tzu of almost any age, but it is almost impossible to resist a Shih Tzu puppy. That adorable little ball of fluff simply demands that you not only pick it up but that you take it home immediately. When you do take your Shih Tzu puppy home, what can you expect from your newfound friend for life?

Character Traits

As described in the ancient standard for the breed, the Shih Tzu is a small, intelligent and extremely docile dog. It is truly a companion dog that likes to be near its owner. Because the primary role of the breed is to excel as a companion and house pet, the dog's ideal temperament is outgoing, happy, affectionate, friendly and trusting. The Shih Tzu's physical characteristics, such as a long coat and brachycephalic head (pushed in face), necessitate that it live as an indoor pet. They don't do well in situations in which they are separated from their owners, and they definitely do not belong in the backyard. Even as indoor dogs, though, they need to be protected from becoming overheated. Be sure that your home is well-ventilated and your dog has access to a room that is cool and protected from direct sunlight.

The Shih Tzu's broad nose makes breathing somewhat difficult, which partially explains its desire to stay indoors. While inside, this breed should never be put in a situation in which it doesn't have access to open free-flowing fresh air. With its bounty of fur, the Shih Tzu can tolerate the cold much better than it can the heat.

The current American Kennel Club Standard for the breed states in part: "The Shih Tzu is a sturdy, lively, alert toy dog with long flowing double coat. Befitting its noble Chinese ancestry as a highly valued, prized companion and palace pet, the Shih Tzu is proud of bearing, has a distinctively arrogant carriage with head well up and tail curved over the back. ..." These are characteristics Shih Tzu possess when they come into the world. How do these traits translate into a home companion? What is it like to live with this energetic and enchanting but stubborn little doggie?

Training? Me? Surely You Jest

Touched with a dose of pride and arrogance, the Shih Tzu is not easy to train. After all, in ancient China, nothing more was required of the Shih Tzu other than looking beautifully ornamental while accompanying emperors and empresses in processions throughout the Chinese streets. Such regal bearings have seemed to stay with the Shih Tzu from one generation to the next because this imperial attitude can still be found in the modern-day Shih Tzu. Along with this arrogance, the Shih Tzu can be quite stubborn, and making this dog do what you want it to do can be a challenge.

Shih Tzu don't like rules. They have relatively short attention spans and selectively short memories. They can become easily distracted and forget where they are and what rule applies to the situation at hand. These are traits that make Shih Tzu the happy-go-lucky little clowns that attract us in the first place, so you must be very patient with training expectations. Some of the more difficult areas of training merit discussion.

Housetraining: Getting the concept of what is commonly known as housebreaking across to the Shih Tzu presents the greatest challenge to its owner. It is probably easier to train your Shih Tzu to eliminate on a newspaper than it is to teach it to go outside. Waiting is not one of the Shih Tzu's better qualities. Sometimes they choose to "forget" their training if you have done something they don't like.

If your Shih Tzu still has a lot of puppy hair or if it is in a trim with full hair on its legs, it might be even more challenging to housebreak it. Remember, these are small dogs with short legs that are close to the ground, which makes it difficult for you to see if they are squatting or lifting a leg. Lots of mistakes may be made along the way to success, but patience will eventually pay off. You will just have to plan ahead to spend the time needed to get the message across to your Shih Tzu. Be sure to take your Shih Tzu outside frequently to prevent it from having any unnecessary accidents inside your home. You are equally responsible for the successful housebreaking of your Shih Tzu puppy or adult. If you are present when your dog eliminates in the proper place, lots of praise and a few cookies will motivate your dog to again properly relieve itself. It is also possible to train small dogs such as the Shih Tzu to use a litter box for emergency needs.

Don't leave me!: Being alone is not what comes naturally to a Shih Tzu. They are people dogs and want to be with you as

much as possible, if not all of the time. This trait cannot be overstressed: Shih Tzu are companion dogs and that means that they want to be your companion.

Many people work outside of the home and enjoy numerous activities outside of it as well, therefore, it is inevitable that at times your Shih Tzu will be home alone. Under these circumstances, your Shih Tzu needs a place of its own. A bed is good, but a crate is preferable. If your puppy spends "time-outs" in its crate from the beginning, it will soon learn that it is a safe, quiet place away from family hubbub. Quite often, if you leave the crate door open, your Shih Tzu will voluntarily venture inside for a refreshing nap. If you make the crate a luringly comfortable placesoft cushion, water bottle and a few toysit becomes a little suite for the dog. Once accustomed to spending time in its crate, the dog will be happier if it has to go to the vet or to the kennel or on an airplane. Your Shih Tzu will feel safe, even if its feelings are hurt because you are putting it on a time-out for misbehaving.