

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the difference between a Labrador and a Retriever?

Retrievers are a type of dog. They are, literally, dogs that retrieve and were originally bred to retrieve game for hunters both on land and in the water. There are six breeds recognized as Retrievers by the AKC. They are: Labrador Retrievers, Golden Retrievers, Chesapeake Bay Retrievers, Flat Coated Retrievers, Curly Coated Retrievers and Irish Water Spaniels. There are other breeds of Retrievers not currently recognized by the AKC, for example CKC's Nova Scotia Duck Tolling Retriever.



Labradors don't shed, do they?

Actually, they do. Labradors have what is called a double coat. This means that they have a soft, downy undercoat and a harder guard coat. These two types of coat help keep the dog warm and dry while swimming in cold waters when retrieving ducks. Generally Labradors will shed their coat twice a year. This is called "blowing" their coat. They are moderate shedders, not enthusiastic ones such as Alaskan Malamutes or German Shepherd Dogs. There will be a certain amount of hair loss throughout the year, especially in more temperate climates. This varies individually; some Labradors shed less than others, especially if they happen to have an incorrect coat.

How much grooming do they need?

Labs need to be brushed on a regular basis (about once a week) to keep them clean. This will also help keep the shedding under control. A "slicker" type brush, which you can buy at any pet store, works nicely. Labs, like all dogs, need to have their toenails clipped regularly. You can get a canine nail clipper at any pet store and your vet can demonstrate to you the best way to clip their nails. Labs do not need to be bathed frequently. The Labrador coat does not need constant attention. A true bath, which includes shampooing the coat, is only necessary if the dog smells bad. Generally, if a dog is merely dusty or muddy, you can rinse them off with plain water or wait until they are dry and brush the dirt out to restore them to cleanliness. Shampooing them too often is not a good idea as shampoo tends to strip the natural oils out of their coats. A properly oily coat repels dirt and sheds water easily. In general, Labrador coats are low-maintenance.

Are Labradors hyper?

A Labrador with correct temperament is never hyperactive. Individual dogs can be. With the steady increase of popularity of the breed in recent years, more and more Labradors are being bred by people who have less regard for temperament than established breeders. Some people claim that field line Labradors are hyper and show lines are mellow. Others claim that field line Labradors are mellow and show lines are hyper! In reality, it appears that "backyard bred" Labradors have by far the worst temperaments. If you don't breed for good temperaments, you won't get them except by accident. ("Backyard breeders" refers to people with little or no knowledge of breeding dogs doing so mostly for the money or because it seems the thing to do, or even by accident. A better term is "disreputable breeders." There are plenty of small-scale, or hobby, breeders with wonderful reputations for producing sound, good tempered, well-balanced dogs.)

The best advice for finding a Labrador with the right temperament is to thoroughly investigate the breeders you are considering. Ask to see their other dogs--this should give you an idea of the energy level you can expect from their puppies. Ask for the names of other people who have previously purchased dogs from them -- and then contact these people and ask them whether they'd recommend this breeder or not. Labradors with poor temperaments are often the result of thoughtless breeding and will not appear in dogs from either show lines or field lines that have been conscientiously bred.

However, Labradors are active dogs especially in puppyhood. And Labradors often do not fully mature until around 3 years of age! This means you will have a dog that is mentally a puppy (with a puppy's energy) until this age regardless of its physical size! Often a Lab puppy is labelled hyperactive when it is simply a normal, exuberant and bouncy puppy. If you are prepared to deal with this period of time in their lives, you will not have problems. It is the people caught unprepared who then label their puppy hyperactive and incorrigible and dump it.

We would like to stress that such dogs, untrained and unexercised, WILL be a huge problem for their owners, becoming destructive, unmanageable, and in many cases escape artists. Once under proper discipline (which does NOT mean beating the dog!), most of these Labs will shape up into good pets.

What is "butt-tucking"?

"Butt-tucking" (not limited to Labs) is when your pup suddenly starts running in circles at top speed with his rear tucked under him. Most Labradors do this. It does not indicate a problem with your Lab, either with its temperament or its joints. However, you will want to keep a sharp eye out that you are not injured during this free-for-all!

Labradors are popular, aren't they?

Yes. Since 1991, they have been the top registered dog with the AKC. At the end of 1997, the U.S. President got a chocolate Labrador. This means that there are a lot of people out there breeding Labradors hoping to make a few quick bucks (as opposed to improving the breed). You need to be very careful about where you get your Labrador. Disreputable breeders are the primary source for hyper, ill-behaved and ill-favored Labradors. With a bit of research and care, you can find good puppies. The average price for a properly bred Labrador puppy is about 400-600 dollars, more for a show- or field trial- quality puppy. If you are asked to pay substantially more or less for a puppy without good reason given, be wary.

I'm confused -- which kind of Labrador will make a better hunter, a show-line or field-line Labrador?

Most Labradors, show and field bred, make great hunters. Your own level of expertise in picking out likely puppies and training them is probably as important as the pedigree of the dog. You should consider what kind of hunting you do, how much experience you have, and discuss all of this with the breeders you consult.

If you are specifically interested in field trials, you are advised to look for good field trial kennels. (Just as, if you are interested in showing in conformation, you should look for good breed ring kennels.) This split is unfortunate, but it does occur since both field trials and conformation trials are essentially highly specialized sports. Very few breeders have the resources to compete seriously in both venues.

No matter which lines you are interested in, you should try to find the puppies that are well balanced with correct structure and conformation as the base. Whether you are interested in pet, show, hunting, etc., will determine the other characteristics that you want. But an unsound dog does not make a good show dog, hunter, obedience dog, nor pet!

Do they make good guard dogs?

Labradors are not reliable guards. Some can be protective and most will probably bark if they hear or see something they don't like -- particularly if it is near their yard. If your main purpose in getting a dog is to have a guard dog, a Labrador is not a good choice, but if you want an "alarm" barker, most Labradors are fine.

What kind of work can Labradors do?

Besides hunting, doing field trials, and being terrific pets? Quite a bit. Many Labradors are used as Service and Therapy dogs, for example. Still others do very well in Search and Rescue work, as well as making excellent Bomb, Narcotic, and Arson dogs. Their nose, disposition, and trainability make them particularly suitable for these types of activities and the breed has a distinguished history in these endeavors.

Interestingly, in comparison to other breeds, such as Golden Retrievers, there are relatively few Labradors in obedience competition. No one is quite certain why, although of course several theories have been advanced, from Labradors are a little too "disobedient" (a necessary ability in Service work -- to disobey an unsafe command), to most people with Labradors being involved in other activities such as Hunt Tests.

How are they with children?

As a breed, Labradors tend to be good with children. However, as with any dog, it is not a good idea to let puppies and children play unattended. Both puppies and children tend to be unaware of their own size and strength and could accidentally injure one another. Labradors aren't likely to intentionally hurt anyone, but could knock a child over when they thought they were playing. By the same measure, children can inadvertently hurt a puppy if they aren't supervised. As a parent of a young child and the owner of a young Lab puppy, realize that you will have to spend time teaching both the child and the puppy how to behave around one another.

Note that a Labrador that is not well trained nor properly exercised is much more of an accidental hazard to children than one who is kept firmly under control.

Do Labradors like to swim?

Labradors love to swim. In general, they take to swimming quite naturally. But don't be alarmed if your little pup is unsure about swimming the first time--they have to learn about swimming just like anything else. Never throw a young puppy into the water! If you have an adult dog around that enjoys swimming, the pup will probably follow it in happily. You could also wade in yourself and have the pup follow. Be aware though that pups have sharp nails which can be painful if they try to climb up on you in the water. The pup's first introduction to the water should be at a spot where there is a gradual entry, rather than a sharp drop off, and there should be no current at all. Let the pup explore the water at his own pace; if he just wants to splash and wade for now, let him. As he gains confidence, he will go in deeper.

Another important caveat is that dogs should not be allowed unattended access to a swimming pool unless you know that they know how to get out. Dogs often cannot easily pull themselves out of the pool and even strong swimmers will tire if they can't find an easy way out of the water. And if you do let your Lab in your swimming pool, check that filter often! Dogs shed much more than people do.

Are there golden Labs? What is the difference between golden and yellow Labs?

Labradors come in three colors: black, chocolate, and yellow. Yellow Labradors are often mistakenly called "golden Labradors." The term yellow refers to a range of color from nearly white to gold to fox-red. The Golden Retriever is a separate breed from the Labrador, although there are similarities. Sometimes the term is used informally to refer to a Labrador / Golden Retriever mix.

Are there any other colors of Labradors?

No. Black, chocolate, and yellow are the only correct colors. While mis-marked purebred Labradors are possible, be wary of those selling "rare" Labradors of other colors at exorbitant prices. There are yellow Labradors that are so pale they appear white, but they are still considered to be yellow and will usually have some color, even if it is only on the ear tips. These lighter yellows not unusual nor rare and should not command a significant price hike. The same goes for "fox red" Labradors. Variations in the color of yellow Labradors are not penalized, but treated the same as any other yellow Labrador; however the lighter shades tend to predominate in the ring at this time.

"Silver" Labradors are purely a scam and are either crosses with Weimaraners or very light chocolates. An actual silver Labrador (possibly a dilute chocolate) would be treated as a mismarked dog and not command a high price. To our knowledge, "blue" Labradors (dilute blacks) have never been offered, but if they were, the same caveats as the silver Labs would apply. It's possible the silver Labs are actually dilute blacks; no one has done any test breeding to verify and the owners of the silver kennels are remarkably secretive about their dogs. However, based on a comparison with Doberman Pinschers, it seems reasonable to speculate that silvers are dilute chocolates ("fawns" in Dobermans).

Can you get yellow Labradors from black ones? And vice versa? What about chocolates?

Yes, you can get yellows from blacks and blacks from yellows. Similarly, you can get chocolates from blacks or yellows and vice-versa. It all depends on what color genes the parents carry. The only absolutes are that if both parents are yellow, the resulting puppies are always yellow, never black or chocolate; if both parents are chocolate, you can get yellow or chocolate puppies but never black ones.

Are there differences between Labs of different colors?

Aside from the color itself, there are no differences. Many people feel that black Labs are better hunters, yellow dogs are lazier, and chocolate dogs are hardheaded and stubborn. None of this is true. The reason is pure genetics. Coat color in normally colored Labs is determined by two genes unrelated to anything else about the dog. It is perfectly possible to get all three colors in the same litter, therefore the notion that there is a color based difference in temperament and/or ability is absurd.

Alright, so what is the nitty gritty on coat color inheritance?

Two sets of genes, not one, control a Lab's coloration. One set of genes controls whether the Lab will be dark (either black or chocolate) or light (yellow). Dark is dominant over light. Thus a Lab whose genotype is EE (homozygous dominant) or Ee (heterozygous) will be dark; only Labs that are ee (homozygous recessive) can be light.

The second set of genes only come into play if the Lab is dark (either EE or Ee). This set controls whether the Lab is black (the dominant trait) or chocolate (the recessive trait). Thus, a dark dog (ie. EE/Ee) that is BB (homozygous dominant) or Bb (heterozygous) will be black, while the only way a dog can be chocolate is for it to be dark (EE/Ee) AND bb (homozygous recessive).

So now, the possibilities for black dogs are EEBB, EEbb, EeBB, or EeBb. The possibilities for a yellow dog are eeBB, eeBb, or eebb. And the possibilities for a chocolate dog are EEbb or Eebb. Remember that puppies will get one E/e from the dam and one from the sire, as well as one B/b from the dam and one from the sire to make up their complete "code". If you had two parents that were both EeBb (black in appearance), you can get all three colors in the resulting litter! Furthermore, when you realize that a pair of yellows can only give their puppies the ee combination, you understand why two yellows only produce yellows. In a similar fashion, two chocolates can only bequeath bb to their puppies, so two chocolates can never produce a black puppy.

The eebb is an interesting case, as this is a yellow dog with chocolate pigmentation on its nose and eyerims. A dog that is bb always has this pigmentation. Under the current standard, a yellow with chocolate pigmentation is disqualified.

If the Lab is mismarked, for example Black and Tan, or brindled, there are other alleles present in that dog's makeup. If you are interested in a further discussion of these genes, do look up Clarence C. Little's classic book, *The Inheritance of Coat Color in Dogs*.

Traditionally, the way to determine a dog's genetic background for color is to examine the whelping box: a dog that produces yellows and/or chocolate carries those genes. And dogs carry what their parents have; a black with one yellow or chocolate parent must carry the yellow or chocolate gene. But for those who really want to know for certain can now make use of a simple cheek swab test to determine their dog's genotype. VetGen (1-800-483-8436) has such a test for \$85.

What is a Dudley?

This is a yellow Labrador with chocolate pigmentation (eebb). It can also refer to a Lab with absolutely no pigmentation on the nose or eyerims (all pink in color), but in actuality, this is extremely rare, and probably a genetic abnormality. Please be aware that, while this trait is considered undesirable, it does not indicate some sort of genetic abnormality. There is no known correlation between Dudley noses and poor health.

But I see some Labradors with a pinkish nose.

Yes, this happens with many breeds, actually. It is called "winter nose" or "snow nose." Many yellow Labs will have dark noses in the summer that fade somewhat in the winter and repeat the cycle the next year. It is not understood why this happens. You can see it in many northern breeds such as Huskies and Malamutes as well. This is not considered a fault in any of these breeds and is not penalized. To differentiate between Labs with faded noses and Dudleys, check the eyerims and gum tissue of the dogs. A Dudley will have only light pink or tan skin; the other dogs will have black pigment in these areas.

Do they jump fences? Are they good escape artists?

They are not renowned for this as a breed, although individual Labradors can be clever at escaping. Some can be good at opening doors and latches. A six-foot fence properly grounded will keep a Labrador from jumping, although many Labradors will never jump a four-foot fence perimeter. Because they can chew a lot, take care that your enclosure cannot be chewed through. They can also be good climbers, so check for possible footholds the dog could use to haul himself up (for example, check if a doghouse provides a platform from which to jump a fence).

A Lab that is bored and/or underexercised may turn into an escape artist par excellence.

Do they bark a lot?

Bored Labradors can, but excessive barking is not generally typical of the breed. Labradors often give a warning bark in response to an unusual event that they feel needs your attention, such as "Hey, a car pulled into the driveway!"

Will a male or female Labrador make a better pet?

Both sexes make good pets. In general, male Labradors are more dependent and females are somewhat independent. For example, if you are at home working on your computer, your male Labrador will probably sleep right under your feet while your female will probably sleep in the other room and just come in and check on you periodically.

Where should I get my dog?

You have to first decide if you are getting a puppy or an adult Lab. If you choose to get an adult dog, you could get one from the pound, from a Labrador Rescue organization, or from a breeder who is looking for a home for an adult Labrador. There is more about Rescue organizations at the end of this file. If you decide to get a puppy, you should do some research and find a reputable breeder you trust.

How do I choose a puppy?

You need to do some homework before you start talking to breeders and certainly before you look at any puppies. You need to make some decisions about what sex and color you'd like. What you plan to do with the dog. What kind of temperament you'd like. Once you have some answers to those questions, you should discuss your concerns and ideas with breeders. After you have found a breeder you like, then allow the breeder to help you select your puppy. Most breeders have a pretty good idea of what the puppies' personalities are like and will guide you to a good choice.



What health problems are Labradors prone to?

Hip and elbow dysplasia can be a problem, so be sure to look for breeders that certify their dogs through OFA or Wind-Morgan. Progressive Retinal Atrophy and Retinal Dysplasia are both problems in this breed, so dogs being bred must be examined yearly by an veterinary ophthalmologist. Labradors are prone to mild skin allergies in some regions of the US, notably Southern California. Ear infections are always a potential problem with hanging ears. You can minimize the potential for health problems by choosing the breeder of your puppy carefully.

What is this I hear about the lawsuit with the AKC?

Over the past five years or so, the national breed club for Labrador Retrievers (the LRC) has been trying to revise the standard for the breed. Many bench, or show, people objected to the revisions being made. The AKC took the unprecedented step, because of the

amount of controversy on the subject, of returning the first submitted revision in 1993. The LRC resubmitted the revised standard, still over the objections of the bench community, and the standard took effect April 1, 1994. As the new standard included disqualifications for height, some breeders are now unable to show their dogs, and six of them put together a lawsuit based on the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, claiming that the LRC rewrote the standard to admit their dogs to the ring while excluding the objecting breeders' dogs.

It is important to remember that a large part of the controversy revolves around the fact that the LRC has a limited membership -- the most popular AKC breed in the US has a national breed club composed of 700 members, down from 900 several years ago. Most of these members are oriented toward field trials. Many show oriented fanciers greatly resented the lack of involvement allowed them throughout the revision process. On the other side of the issue, the LRC and the AKC have stated that they do not feel the standard provides any hardship to Labrador breeders and have asked that the suit be dismissed due to lack of merit. There is a good deal of acrimony on both sides that has contributed to the overall issue.

At the moment the lawsuit against the LRC and the AKC is still pending.