

# *So You Want an Alaskan Malamute?*

---

**Great!** You saw them on TV, in the movies, or you've been to a dog show or two. Maybe you just met a pair in the park or a cute fluffy puppy and said to yourself...

***"I want a Malamute!"***

But now that you know what you like, you need to ask yourself one question:

***"WHY?"*** ... and *please*, do be honest!

---

## **Why do I want an Alaskan Malamute?**

Do you just like a pretty dog? Do you want a big dog to impress the neighbors, scare the crooks, or just looks like a wolf? Is that happy puppy simply the cutest ball of teddy bear fluff? Did the kids nag you into one, or is it somebody's birthday or a gift-giving holiday?

If you said yes to any of those questions... do yourself a big favor now: run to the nearest toy store and buy yourself a stuffed toy dog. The Alaskan Malamute is not the right breed for you!

However, you are off to a good start if you actually took the time to ask yourself "WHY" you are interested in Malamutes and "WHAT" attracted you to this breed! Yes, it can be difficult to say what first attracts a person to a Malamute, and looks or just a personal preference will have much to do with it. However, if you are unwilling to ask yourself these simple questions - you are probably not interested enough to learn much about this dog breed. Malamutes may live well into their "teens" so there is much to learn for a happy long-term relationship!

## **What do I know about Alaskan Malamutes?**

There is much history surrounding the Alaskan Malamute. To understand their background is a good start to understand Mals and successfully live with them. There are many good reading resources on Malamute history, but here is a quick synopsis to get you started:

Native Alaskans used Malamutes to pull heavy loads in the harsh arctic conditions and to hunt food. The arctic demands a "survival of the fittest" attitude, so Malamutes retain most of the "pack order" instinct. They needed intelligence and problem solving abilities to make independent decisions about trail hazards, including disobeying orders from their human companions. Arctic food is very scarce. It was highly important to eat whenever the opportunity arose and to get the most energy possible from the food eaten. Malamutes also supplemented their diet with prey caught in the wild. Simply put, centuries of their original arctic environment molded the Alaskan Malamute both physically and mentally.

Ok, so what does all that have to do with Alaskan Malamutes and you in these modern times? PLENTY! Malamutes have not changed their behavior to suit you, suburbia, nor anything else. They have only modified it somewhat for today's world...







## So You Want an Alaskan Malamute?

---

### Coat & Hair:

The Alaskan Malamute's double coat evolved to insulate from the surrounding environment. The outer guard coat is a coarse medium length hair, slightly oily to the touch, and is the first layer of defense to repel dirt, snow, or ice. The shorter undercoat is thick dense "wool" that blocks out the wind or cold. Malamutes with a long, and often soft, coat are called "woollies". The texture and excessive length of a woolly's coat does not provide good insulation from extreme weather, but it does not hinder them from being good companions.

Malamutes are adaptable to warm climates, but their coat will not be as thick as dogs raised in the cold. In warmer areas, you should not exercise your Malamute during the heat of the day and you must provide extra water at all times. Mals in very hot temperatures, or not used to the heat, should stay indoors during the day to avoid problems such as heat stroke.

It is not recommended to shave a Malamute coat as it provides some insulation from the heat as well as the cold. However, cutting or trimming a very long coat (such as a Woolly") to a more moderate length provides for easier care.

Twice a year the Malamute sheds its undercoat. A common and more descriptive term is "blowing" coat. The amount of hair lost in a few weeks is staggering and easily fills several garbage bags. In a full "coat blow", the undercoat can come out in large clumps of hair. Mals may shed all year long in warm climates, with a heavier shedding period twice a year. So if you truly like an ultra clean house, or do not like dog hair, consider another breed.

Malamutes do not have the strong "doggie" odor often noticed in other breeds. A few may develop a sour smell if a thoroughly wet coat is not fully dried. This is because water trapped within the thick undercoat becomes a breeding ground for bacteria and skin problems. Mals do take a long time to dry after a bath or swim even with a high-powered dog dryer. However, they are also clean dogs who groom themselves much as a cat would. Dirt and water that does not reach into the undercoat usually comes out with your brushing or their own grooming.

### If Dogs Could Talk:

One of the most endearing (and sometimes exasperating) characteristics of the Alaskan Malamute is the fact that they talk. Their "Mala-speak" is usually sounds such as "oowooo", "wroowuf", etc. Be warned, if they talk... they will also "talk back", just as any arguing child would do. Owners often find themselves in a full conversation with their Mals and with both parties completely understanding what the other has said.

Malamutes will also howl (or sing, depending on your point of view?). In a group of dogs, this is a form of communication and pack unity. Individually, it may be a call for someone else to communicate with them or to answer a passing siren. Mals may howl when they are happy, just as easily as other breeds howl when they are lonely.

Most Malamutes are not prone to barking. But they may pick up this habit if raised around other dogs that do bark. Even so, their bark is often a combination of a bark/yip and rarely to the amount of excessive barking.

## So You Want an Alaskan Malamute?

---

### What other Malamute information should I know?

Now that you know a little more about the Alaskan Malamute, you are better able to decide if a Malamute is the right choice for your home. There is still much more to learn about the Alaskan Malamute and it is in your best interest to learn all you can before bringing a Malamute home.

Remember this is a large and physically powerful breed, with a strong will and an independent nature. This is not a breed you can truly own in the normal sense. Nevertheless, you can form a good lasting relationship with this breed... provided you are willing to adapt, compromise, be creative, learn as much as possible, and work at a mutual bond of respect and companionship.

But before you make that final decision to bring an Alaskan Malamute into your family, here are a few helpful topics you should research and read...

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* Alaskan Malamute health issues.</li><li>* General dog, wolf, and pack behavior.</li><li>* Motivational and clicker training techniques.</li><li>* Should I choose a breeder or breed rescue?</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>* How to evaluate a breeder or breed rescue.</li><li>* How to pick a puppy or dog to fit your home.</li><li>* Puppy mills, pet shops, backyard breeders.</li></ul> |
|--|--|

Whatever you finally decide; whether you get an Alaskan Malamute, another breed, or choose not to have a dog at all... good wishes in making your best personal choice!

---

© 2002 M.Serage of Texas Alaskan Malamute Rescue. Permission granted for public non-profit reproduction and distribution.