

Congratulations

On Your New Belgian Sheepdog! (Groenendael)



The Belgian Sheepdog is an intelligent and loyal companion who requires time, training and socialization and an outlet for his boundless energy. Due to his size, intelligence, vibrant personality and elegant beauty, owning a Belgian Sheepdog is a responsibility not to be taken lightly. When you invest time in training and socialization, your dog will develop into a well-adjusted adult that you will be proud to be seen with in public. To help you provide the best care for your Belgian Sheepdog, we encourage you to participate in the **Belgian Sheepdog Club of America**, regional special interest clubs, Internet chat lists, and a course in basic obedience.

Origins

As stated in the Belgian Sheepdog standard, the Belgian Sheepdog is known as the Groenendael, or *Chien de Berger Belge*, in most parts of the world. Its origin can be traced to the late 1800s when it was listed among the many other shepherds as a *Chien de Berger de Races Continentales*, which also included German Shepherds, Hollander Herders, Beaucerons, Bouvier des Flandres and Briards.

In Belgium, efforts were made to determine if there was a true shepherd dog representative only of Belgium. In November of 1891, under the direction of veterinarian professor Adolphe Reul, a gathering was held on the outskirts of Brussels to examine the shepherd dogs of that area. From this gathering it was concluded that for this Brabant Province there was a consistent type of sheepdog that differed only in color, hair texture, and hair length. These dogs were then called Belgian Shepherd Dogs. The coat textures, coat lengths and the coat colors determined the variety designations. The long-coated red or gray with black mask was designated the Tervuren. The short-coated red or gray with dark mask was designated the Malinois. The long-coated black Groenendael was designated as the Belgian Sheepdog and the wire-coated red or gray was designated the Laekenois. In 1959 the American Kennel Club determined the different varieties to be separate breeds.

Throughout their history, Belgian Sheepdogs have earned their reputation as truly well-rounded dogs, and to this day they



Photo by deliriofoto.com

continue to captivate us. Their elegance of carriage, striking black silhouette, and balanced movement are a pleasure to behold. Their talents in obedience, tracking, herding, agility, flyball, ringsport and as sled dogs have kept even the most activity-minded people satisfied. Their skills in police work, Red Cross, search and rescue, and as assistance and therapy dogs have proven very valuable to society. However, these dogs have found their greatest value in the hearts of their owners as devoted companions willing to give their all to those they love.

Temperament

Belgian Sheepdogs are sensitive, intelligent, high-energy dogs. They are easily trained as long as training is done with gentle handling and without severe physical correction. Most Belgian Sheepdogs are energetic dogs and require vigorous daily exercise to keep them healthy and happy. Running and playing with another dog, retrieving a ball, swimming or participating in other activities are some ways your dog can get the exercise he needs. If adequate exercise is not provided on a daily basis, your dog may bark or become destructive out of frustration and boredom.

Belgian Sheepdogs are healthy and long-lived dogs and are excellent companions. They are tolerant of respectful children. Due to their herding and working history, they are intuitively protective of their people. They are dogs that thrive on human companionship. They have an intense need to be near their owners, following them from room to room when indoors and watching them closely at all times. Because of this trait, your Belgian Sheepdog will be happiest when kept in the house as a member of your family. Dogs kept in kennels or outdoors in fenced yards need a significant amount of "people time" each day in order to remain emotionally healthy. Isolation from humans will quickly ruin a Belgian Sheepdog's personality and general outlook.

Care and Grooming

Belgian Sheepdogs require a proper diet of quality food and regular medical care with required vaccinations for protection against diseases. Heartworm medication is highly recommended if you live in a heartworm area. A healthy Belgian Sheepdog coat sheds dirt and does not require a great deal of maintenance. Weekly brushing down to the skin with a pin brush will eliminate mats and tangles and remove dander and dust. A slicker brush and undercoat rake will help remove undercoat during the shedding season.

Weekly toenail trimming and teeth cleaning should also be part of your dog's grooming routine. Owners who have taken proper care of their dogs are usually rewarded with their Belgians Sheepdogs living long active lives. A Belgian Sheepdog living to 14 years of age is not unheard of.

Be a Responsible Pet Owner

As a dog owner, your responsibility includes ensuring that your dog has a securely fenced area in which to exercise and leashing him when exercising in public places. When your

Belgian Sheepdog is not being supervised, he should be confined to your home or a fenced area. Your dog should never be allowed to run free or roam as he could be injured or killed or cause damage to property. You should never keep a dog tied or chained because of the high risk of injury to the dog.

The **Belgian Sheepdog Club of America** and its affiliate regional clubs strongly recommend that you spay or neuter your Belgian Sheepdog. Most responsible breeders require this by selling their companion animals with spay/neuter contracts. There are several important reasons for this recommendation:

1. Neutered and spayed animals are normally healthier and usually live longer than unaltered animals.
2. Spaying a female before her first season greatly reduces the risk of mammary tumors later in life and the danger of life-threatening uterine infections.
3. Neutering a male removes the possibility of testicular cancer and lowers the risk of prostate problems. A neutered male will generally be more tolerant of other male dogs.
4. Altering your dog **WILL NOT** change the basic disposition of your Belgian Sheepdog. The American Kennel Club permits dogs that have been spayed and neutered to participate in all phases of companion events.

Health Concerns

Belgian Sheepdogs are generally a healthy breed but, like all living things, can be susceptible to disease and affected by hereditary issues. Every breed has health concerns that owners (both new and experienced) need to be aware of in order to make the best decisions about ownership.

In this breed, some problems that are seen are **cancer, epilepsy, hip and elbow dysplasia, PRA and cataracts. Hypothyroidism and retained testicles issues** are seen as well. Each of these health issues are commonly found across all pedigree lines.

A breeder that subscribes to the **Belgian Sheepdog Club of America** Code of Ethics will try to reduce the likelihood that these health issues will occur in the dogs that they produce by completing health clearances on their breeding dogs. But most of these health issues are polygenetic and come from more than one gene pair. These traits are more complex than the typical dominant or recessive genetic trait and therefore, much more difficult to identify in breeding stock unless the dog is symptomatically affected.

Another point to consider is that the health concerns highlighted here are very rarely unmanageable—or result in the death of a pet. Many times, the health concerns referenced are much more of an inconvenience to the owners than they are to the dogs—which learn to compensate quickly.

Conclusion

If the day should come when you can no longer keep your Belgian Sheepdog (for whatever reason: divorce, moving, death in the family, personal health crisis, etc.) the **Belgian**



Sheepdog Club of America urges you to **NEVER** take your dog to an animal shelter.

You should *first contact the breeder* of your dog. This is one of the reasons that responsible breeders want to stay in touch with their puppy buyers. If that is not successful or you cannot locate the breeder, *then contact the Breed Rescue*. Sometimes the local shelter knows who the Breed Rescue contact person is in their area. If they do not, then *please contact the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America* either through their club Web site at <http://www.bsca.info> or through the American Kennel Club Web site at <http://www.AKC.org>.



Contacts

The Belgian Sheepdog Club of America
Attn: Corresponding Secretary
<http://www.bsca.info>

The American Kennel Club
<http://www.AKC.org>



The Belgian Sheepdog Club of America

Recommended Reading

The Belgian Sheepdog Newsletter
Contact the Belgian Sheepdog Club of America

Belgians: From Start to Finished
Comstock, Alpine Blue Ribbon Books

How to Raise a Puppy You Can Live With
Rutherford and Neil, Alpine Blue Ribbon Books

Mother Knows Best
Benjamin, Howell Books

Health Testing, Information and Certifications Currently Available for Belgian Sheepdogs

From the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA)
<http://www.offa.org>

Hip Dysplasia
Elbow Dysplasia
Thyroid Function
Slipped Stifles and Hocks
Heart Deformities

The Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF)
<http://www.vmdb.org/cerf.html>
Eye Defects

The University of California—Davis
DNA “Carrier” Testing for Epilepsy

The Canine Health Foundation
<http://www.akcchf.org>
Canine Health Research and Reference Site

