

# The Great Pyrenees

## Congratulations on your new Great Pyrenees



### History

These dogs take their name from the mountain range in south-western Europe, where they have long been used as guardians of the flocks. In the United States they are called Great Pyrenees. In the United Kingdom and on the continent of Europe, they are known as the Pyrenean Mountain Dog. In their native France, they are Le Chien de Montagne des Pyrenees or Le Chien des Pyrenees.

Whatever the name, it is a beautiful white dog with a "certain elegance" which for centuries has been the working associate of peasant shepherds high on the mountain slopes; the dog was "discovered" by French nobility in the seventeenth century and elevated to the status of court dog of France. While it is generally accepted that no living breed of dog can be traced back to its wild form, and that what is known about dogs of any sort prior to a century or two ago is so little, these dogs are believed to have migrated into Europe from Asia Minor, moving westward and leaving kin in all the prominent mountain valleys of Europe. These later developed individual characteristics in the seclusion of their own environment and came to be known as the Maremma, Kuvasz, Polish Tatra, Akbash, Slovakian Chuvach, and others.

### Care and Housing

Great Pyrenees are at heart territorial guard dogs and members of the great family of livestock guardian dogs. As such, they share with them certain strong characteristics. They are guard dogs by instinct, not by training. Their basic personality is different from most breeds, since most breeds were bred to take commands from people, while Pyrs were bred to work naturally from their ancient instincts. A Great Pyrenees is an intelligent, sometimes willful animal. They have minds of their own and are not easily obedience trained. Things that you consider important may not be the same things your Pyrenees considers important.

Great Pyrenees must be confined in a well-fenced area or they will exercise their powerful instinct to establish and patrol a large territory. Fences must be a minimum of 6 feet high, and gates must have adequate and secure locks. When outside of the fence, Pyrs must be kept on leash at all times. Underground or invisible fencing is not appropriate for Pyrs. Very often it will not keep them in if they want out badly enough. They will routinely withstand the shock to do so. Even if it does keep them in, it will not keep other animals and people out. The Great Pyrenees is a guard dog, and as such, cannot be expected to welcome uninvited guests onto your property. They should accept anyone whom you invite into your home. They are not "attack" dogs, but can be very intimidating to the surprised visitor. It is an owner's obligation to maintain a Great Pyrenees so that his guarding instincts can be exercised in a responsible manner. Like all livestock guardian breeds, Great Pyrenees are barkers,

especially at night. The amount of barking varies from individual to individual, but the instinct is there. Most Great Pyrenees in urban or suburban settings must be kept indoors at night.

### Feeding, Grooming, and Training

In feeding, common sense is your best guide. A slow gain one week may be picked up the next. We cannot stress too strongly that the pup's weight must be kept under control. A fat puppy is **not** a healthy puppy. The bones of a giant breed pup remain soft and growing longer than those of smaller breeds, and excess weight adds immeasurably to the strain on growing bones. There are even some painful and crippling bone and joint problems that can be caused or exacerbated by excess weight in a growing pup. Breeders and many vets recommend that the pups be put on a "maintenance" kibble not later than 6 months. This will help maintain slow but steady growth—better a little thin than a little fat. The basis of a good diet is a high quality kibble. Be sure that water is available at all times. If you feed a good basic diet, you may add occasional table scraps as long as the dog's weight stays down. Pups and grown dogs love bones and love to chew. Please, give them only the large soup variety as even a tiny puppy can do shocking damage with his jaws.

Great Pyrenees need to be brushed on a regular basis once a week. Brushing the top of the coat will not do an adequate job. You must be careful to part the hair and brush and comb the dog from the skin out so that mats do not form. Pay particular attention to the areas behind the ears, around the neck, on the belly, and on the back of the legs where the coat mats most often. When the dog sheds its coat, daily brushing will be necessary for several weeks to ensure that the dead hair is removed. If it is not, it will become bound up against the dog's skin and can cause severe and painful skin problems. When you do the regular grooming, be sure to clip nails, especially the dewclaws, which can grow in a circle and become embedded in the pad. Clean the ears using cotton balls. You may bathe your dog if you think that it is necessary, but be sure to keep him warm and out of drafts until he is dry. Actually, Pyrs who are brushed regularly seldom need to be bathed.

Training is simply a matter of teaching your dog those basic manners that make it a pleasant pet and companion. The first rule is discipline, and it must be firm, consistent, and immediate. Do not let the fact that the pup is cute and cuddly deter you from firm insistence of the rules. When it weighs 100+ pounds, he is **not** going to be cute, and you may no longer be able to enforce those rules physically. A dog is by nature a pack animal. It looks for a leader and if you regard yourself as its leader and enforce it, the dog will accept your

discipline. Decide upon your needs and rules before the pup arrives, and do not ever allow the pup to violate them without firm consequences. Do not ever allow your pup or adult dog to put its teeth on any human being for any reason. This definitely includes puppy chewing play. Correct such behavior immediately. Also, do not allow adults or children to engage the pup in rough games such as wrestling or to get down on the floor at the pup's level to play. Both of these things encourage dominance in the dog.



## Health

Given proper care and nourishment, a Great Pyrenees is a basically healthy dog. Life spans of twelve or more years are not uncommon. The first rule of good health is to pick a good veterinarian and follow their directions. Have vaccinations, wormings, and heartworm preventative given as they direct, and never fail to have a yearly checkup. If you have some doubt about the dog's condition, it is better to take it to the veterinarian than to neglect a condition that could become grave. If you have a question, no matter how insignificant, ask your vet. A good veterinarian will be glad to answer your questions, as their aim is to help you keep your dog healthy.

Many Great Pyrenees Club of America members support health research for the Great Pyrenees through the AKC Canine Health Foundation—a nonprofit charitable organization whose mission is to help dogs live longer, healthier lives. Supporting the Canine Health Foundation will help ensure a healthy future for all dogs. For more information about ongoing health research to help the Pyr, see [www.akcchf.org](http://www.akcchf.org) or call toll free 1-888-682-9696.

If you have questions about serious health problems in the breed visit the Great Pyrenees Club of America website:

<http://clubs.akc.org/gpca>

## Spay / Neuter

One of the very best things you can do for your dog, whether it is a cherished family pet or a valuable working dog, is to spay or neuter it. The male dog will be less likely to want to roam to pursue his psychological need to mate. A neutered dog cannot develop testicular cancer and has a lower risk of developing prostate cancer. Spayed females are often healthier and are less likely to develop breast cancer or frequently fatal uterine infections. Also, you will not have to worry about male dogs trying to get to her when she is in season and perhaps having an accidental breeding and unplanned puppies. Breeding dogs is a great responsibility and should never be undertaken without much planning and forethought. It requires a significant financial investment and a great deal of time to breed a litter properly. You must have the proper facilities to whelp and house the puppies until they are ready to go to their new homes. And it is a huge commitment of time to interview and educate prospective puppy buyers. It is most important that Great Pyrenees puppies be bought by people who have researched the breed and understand the temperament of these dogs. Hundreds of Pyrs end up in rescue or

shelters each year because their owners did not understand what this breed was all about. AKC registration in no way indicates the quality of a puppy. Raising a litter of pups correctly is an expensive and time-consuming process and seldom worth the effort for the average owner. Results of a recent Great Pyrenees health survey show that altered animals have a longer life span than unaltered animals. So, if what you want from your Great Pyrenees is a happy, healthy, long-lived companion and friend, as free from problems as possible, have it spayed or neutered. You will be glad that you did.

## The Great Pyrenees as a Worker

By nature, the Great Pyrenees is nocturnal. It works well in combination with its shepherd owners and companion herding and guarding dogs with the livestock accompanying this group. It can be trusted with small, young, and helpless animals of any kind, but it has to be watched as a young pup with some supervision and occasional correction required as it usually takes a pup 18 months to become an effective livestock guardian dog. It is one of the most interesting qualities of a Great Pyrenees—the absolute intolerance of all predators (including strange dogs, animals, and people), coupled with extraordinary patience and kindness to stock. The breed works in many settings and under many circumstances. This is a dog that can live on a farm, usually in the proximity of the farmyard and ranch house. He is part pet and part guard dog. He takes care of the farm or ranch, the family, and the stock that is usually pastured close to the house. We also find Pyrs working on large ranches pastured far from the living quarter. The breed performs admirably in any of these situations.

A livestock guardian dog will be more reliable and effective if it is spayed or neutered. This can be done safely as early as seven or eight weeks of age. Most pups go to new homes between seven and twelve weeks and have spent most of that time with their dam and litter mates. A slight advantage is possible from pups being raised with livestock as the breeders can observe their interaction toward the livestock. Many superb and effective working Pyrenees have never seen any type of livestock before their arrival at the ranch. Older Pyrs with no prior livestock experience have been known to make excellent guardians with training and supervision from their new owner.

Pyrs breeding crosses with other breeds or crosses are unknown as to how their traits and instincts will be affected by the crossbreeding and are therefore not recommended.

If you have purchased your pup to be a farm or ranch guardian dog and would like more information or assistance with your pup, visit our web site.

## Resources

Breeders who are members of the Great Pyrenees Club of America agree to abide by a code of ethics. Join the Great Pyrenees Club of America. For more information about Great Pyrenees, Great Pyrenees breeders, local or regional Great Pyrenees Clubs, or the Great Pyrenees Club of America, visit the GPCA website:

<http://clubs.akc.org/gpca>

or contact:

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