

Presenting the Neapolitan Mastiff

by the United States Neapolitan Mastiff Club

Congratulations on your new Mastino!

Welcome to the wonderful world of the Neapolitan Mastiff! We hope you enjoy the unique experience of owning, and being owned by, this ancient canine.

History of The Neapolitan Mastiff Breed

The Neapolitan Mastiff, the Italian mastiff, is a descendent of the war dogs which accompanied the Roman Army across all of Europe. Over the past 2000 years it was refined to its present form as a guardian of the family and estates in northern Italy. *(Note that many use the abbreviation Neo, yet the breed is the Neapolitan, not Neopolitan. True Neapolitan Mastiff lovers the world over prefer the term "Mastino." The plural is "Mastini.")*



Mastini are large, powerful dogs, with a significantly wrinkled head and a serious demeanor. The most important image evoked by the Neapolitan Mastiff is massiveness—massive head, massive bone, massive body. A typical male is 26-29 inches at the shoulder and weighs 140-170 pounds. Females are a bit smaller. While not as tall as the English Mastiff, they often appear more massive. The ears are usually cropped short and the tail cropped by 1/3. These practices began in ancient times.

Temperament

Though Mastini have a fierce appearance, they are generally peaceful, steady dogs with even temperaments. They are wonderful with their families but can be wary of strangers. If they have a personality flaw, it is that, like many mastiffs, they can be stubborn or shy. It is important to get your young Mastino accustomed to strange people, places and noises, so that it can happily accept new people and new experiences. Raising a Mastino requires a real awareness of how giant guard dogs think and behave. This is not always the same as other breeds of dogs!

Messy Dogs

Yes, Mastini drool. Not all of the time but commonly when hot, nervous, or after eating and especially after drinking water. Most Mastino owners learn to keep towels in every room where the dog is allowed and to become deft in mopping doggy chins. Neapolitans are not always the tidiest of eaters. Those big loose lips seem to scatter kibble all over. Pound for pound they are no messier than other dogs—but they are big dogs, and they make a big mess. Be prepared!

In the House—Crate Training

A pristine house with many precious or fragile items is not the ideal environment for a young Mastino. Put the crystal and other breakables safely out of the way. You will find that crate training will be very important to the safety and comfort of your Mastino puppy and to your own peace of mind in dealing with this large, demanding, messy, wonderful dog.

One endearing trait of the Neapolitan is that he or she wants to be right next to its owner. The dog will follow you from room to room, upstairs, downstairs, indoors, outdoors. Wonderful as this may seem, it is very important that you also teach your young puppy to be comfortable in the crate when you need your dog to be safe. If you don't, you can run into the problem of a dog that cannot be apart from you for even a moment. This is called separation anxiety and can result in enormous destruction by a frantic dog.

Obedience Training

Mastini respond well to steady, consistent training. We encourage basic obedience for all Mastini when they are old enough to tolerate a 10-20 minute lesson once or twice every day—about 4 months of age. If you haven't taught your 40 or 60 pound baby "Sit" or "Down" or "Off" or "Come," you will find it very much harder to teach these commands to your wild 100+ pound adolescent!

Protection training is definitely not recommended for a Mastino as its naturally protective temperament is exactly suitable for this giant powerful dog and does not need any exaggeration. We also very strongly recommend that you avoid any training course asking you to send your dog to live with someone else for training. This breed is loyal and loving of its owner, and learns best when trained by someone it knows, not by someone focused on teaching immediate obedience on a strict time frame.

With Children and Others

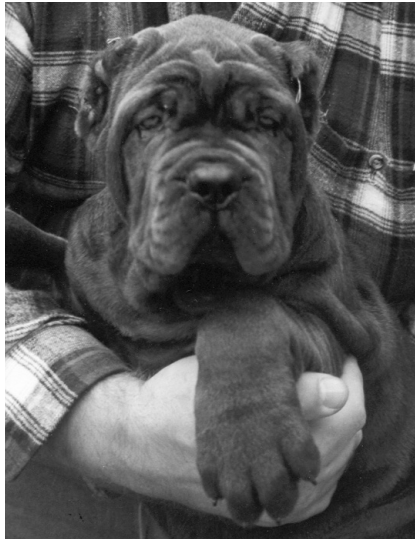
Most Mastini are excellent with the children and people they know and would never hurt them purposely. Still, you must remember that these are huge dogs. For instance, if startled, they may instinctively give chase and will often playfully knock down someone who is running or bicycling past. Their size and these tendencies mean they should never be unsupervised around children even when asleep. Most Neapolitans are good natured and tolerant of other dogs and if they are raised with other animals they are often best friends. However, adult dogs of the same sex cannot be expected to always get along. Most Mastini will chase cats or other small animals.

Feeding

The Mastino eats about the same amount as other giants, about 8-10 cups per day for the adult. Feed the Mastino any quality food and check with your breeder for recommendations. Some breeders supplement with cooked meat, yogurt, pasta, rice, cottage cheese or other items. Puppies (up to a year old) must be fed 2-3 times a day; adults 1-2 times daily. One note: do not feed food too high in protein (too hard on kidneys) and do not supplement with calcium (can lead to joint problems).

Health

Neapolitans are generally hardy dogs. One minor problem that often occurs is “cherry eye.” Tissue in the corner of the eye becomes red and inflamed. This looks terrible, but is cured with a minor veterinarian procedure. Despite impressive wrinkles and loose skin, they should not have skin problems. Young



(8 week old puppy – note size of paw!)

Mastini grow very rapidly for the first year or so, and they can develop temporary problems related to this rapid growth, such as panosteitis (growing pains). Talk to your breeder and your veterinarian about these sorts of problems.

There are health problems that are common in giant dogs and the Mastino is not immune. Bloat is a mysterious

problem of all deep-chested breeds. And as with all breeds, especially the larger ones, the Mastino can develop hip dysplasia. This is another topic to be discussed with your breeder and your veterinarian.

Exercise

The young Mastino grows very rapidly. It is a mistake to play roughly with a young Mastino or to encourage the young dog to run extensively. First of all, these large animals overheat easily. Secondly, overly vigorous exercise can damage the very rapidly growing bones and joints. Let the dog be the leader in the kinds and types of play. Don't encourage the Mastino to chase a Frisbee and do not play tug-of-war with your young puppy. But do take the Mastino for walks and do let the dog play in the yard as long as he or she seems untroubled. Just stop well before the dog shows it is tired.

Mastini have been known to be extremely stoic dogs, and they often ignore pain. This means that the dog may try to participate in play or exercise beyond the point where they should. Because of their clumsiness as they grow, it is relatively easy for a mastiff puppy to incur joint injury. You cannot prevent every accident, but by being careful, you can prevent many problems.

Identification

Protect your Mastino in case it is lost. Identify your Mastino with a collar and tags. A permanent identification with a microchip or tattoo can be registered with AKC's Companion Animal Recovery. A 24-hour toll-free hotline helps locate the owners. There is a 100% re-homing rate with enrolled animals. For information, call 800-252-7894.

Weather Tolerance

Neapolitans love cold weather and under regular conditions, even down to zero degrees, a healthy adult can be outside as long as it has access to a good solid doghouse with plenty of bedding. Puppies and older dogs will, of course, need much more warmth and shelter.

Because Mastini are large dogs and because they are brachycephalic (short-nosed), they have much more trouble with hot weather. They must be able to get out of the sun and into shade, and they must always have lots of clean fresh water available. In extremely hot weather, it is advisable to make sure they are moved into a cool place. Every year, many otherwise healthy dogs die suddenly due to heat intolerance. Owners must be extremely sensitive to this issue and must be very, very cautious, especially in humid weather.

Before You Consider Breeding Your Dog

As the new owner of a Mastino you will find the reactions of neighbors and casual on-lookers to be general astonishment and amazement at your dog. Many new owners are encouraged by this to think about wanting to breed. This is not something you should do casually! Before you even consider breeding your dog, it is critical that you get impartial honest assessments of your dog and its suitability for breeding. Talk to your breeder about your dog, your hopes, and especially about the problems and pitfalls, expenses, and heartaches of breeding.

Breeding any dog is not for the faint of heart, and breeding the Neapolitan Mastiff is much more difficult, time-consuming, and far more expensive than you expect. No female *needs* to have a litter and no male *needs* to sire puppies to be a good family companion. Spaying and neutering your family pet can help prevent problems such as prostate cancer or uterine infections, both of which can threaten your friend's life. And remember, if you breed a litter, it will be your responsibility to know the answers to all the questions that new owners have about the breed, the puppies, and so forth.

We also recommend that you see a large number of other Mastini in person (not just photos in books or on the Internet) and that you talk to many other owners and breeders experienced in this breed before deciding whether or not to breed your dog. We very strongly recommend that you exhibit your dog at breed specialties where you can meet many other like-minded people who can help you in your endeavors.

Recommended Books

Several books that are specific to this breed and that are valuable and interesting to read are:

The Official Book of the Neapolitan Mastiff
by Dr. Sherilyn Allen

The Complete and Reliable Neapolitan Mastiff
by Gonnie Schaeffer & Robert Gravel

The Neapolitan Mastiff
by Carol Paulsen

Learn More through the Parent Club

The US Neapolitan Mastiff Club is the “parent club” for the Neapolitan Mastiff. Breeders, owners, judges, and breed fans join this club to get the newsletter and to be involved or contribute to the preservation of the breed.

We have many educational items available for you... including videotapes, books, back-issues of the newsletter and more! Please visit our website or contact our club directly to learn more about the breed and the club, and please consider submitting an application to join yourself.

US Neapolitan Mastiff Club
4050 Zoo Lane
Brenham, TX 77833

979-836-6867(tel)
979-836-4406 (fax)
www.neapolitan.org