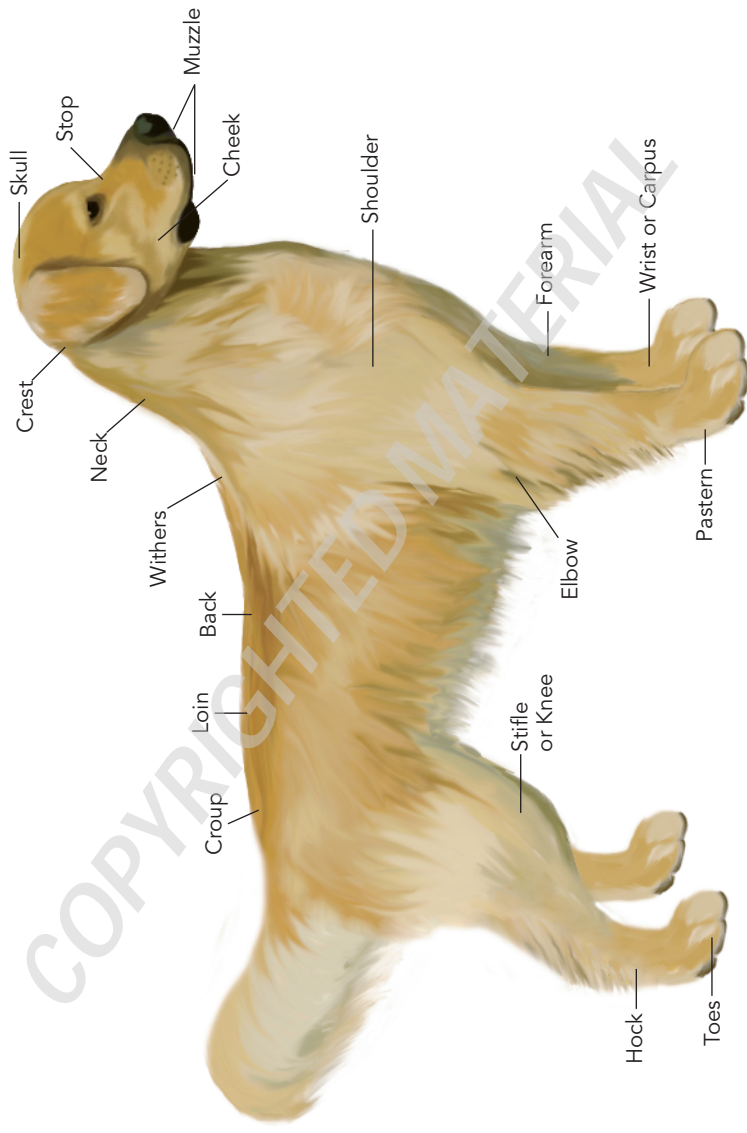


The Golden Retriever





Chapter 1

What Is a Golden Retriever?



The Golden Retriever is a sporting dog with a kind, enthusiastic nature. Equally suited to both city and country lifestyles, the Golden is the perfect breed choice for active families of all sorts. Goldens are tolerant, sensitive, intelligent, and playful. Known for their patience as well as their enthusiasm, and bred to work in close cooperation with people, Goldens make wonderful companions for just about anyone. And anyone who has known or loved a Golden Retriever will tell you they are a dog to seek, keep, and treasure.

The Golden Retriever isn't just an awesome social companion; he is a capable sporting dog who excels in the field, a popular winner in the conformation ring, an enthusiastic obedience and performance competitor, and a devoted assistance dog to owners with special needs. A Golden Retriever may never have more of a job than to be a family pet, but he brings all of these wonderful potentials and abilities into his relationships with every person he meets.

Because of his kind temperament, the Golden Retriever is a trustworthy friend. Whether you are seeking the first best friend for your children or the ideal companion to put the gold in your golden years, this retriever can and will do it with grace and consideration.

Highly sensitive to social cues, Goldens really care about your feelings. Your Golden will pay attention to you, respond to your moods, and reflect his sensitivity every moment you are together. When you're feeling happy and enthusiastic, he'll be bouncing right along with you. During down times, there is nothing finer than the feeling of your loyal Golden turning to and reassuring you. You will never feel lonely when he is near.

The Golden Standard

Just about everyone has a mental picture of the Golden Retriever. Although you may have noticed differences in appearance between various Goldens, and probably even find these differences endearing, there really is an objectively “ideal” Golden Retriever.

The ideal Golden Retriever in the United States is described by the breed’s official American Kennel Club breed standard, which was most recently revised in 1982. Many people think the standard only matters when looking at dogs from a snooty or show ring perspective; but upon closer examination, you’ll probably agree the breed standard actually is of great importance to *all* Golden Retrievers. The standard is the guide breeders refer to when they are planning matings of dogs, with their goal being to produce the most structurally correct and healthy dogs as possible that are true to type. Because they have a standard to breed to, we can recognize an adult Golden and also confidently predict what our Golden puppy will look like when he grows up.

Variations from the standard can be very slight, such as a crooked tooth, or very extreme, such as when a dog has very crooked legs. Differences matter most when you intend to show and then breed your dog. If a structurally incorrect dog is bred, he may pass those faults and problem potentials to his offspring. Structural faults aren’t just about breeding; they also can indicate an underlying tendency toward unsoundness that can result in poor health. If your otherwise healthy pet Golden Retriever seems less than ideal according to the breed standard’s description, remember that he may not be of perfect breeding quality, but he is still *your* ideal, and that matters most of all!



The Golden Retriever is a sporting dog, and that heritage definitely influences his appearance and his behavior.

The Sum of All Parts

The emphasis when identifying the ideal Golden Retriever is on his overall appearance, personality, and working attitude and ability. The breed standard does offer a rather detailed breakdown of Golden Retriever individual parts, describing how they should look and fit together. If you are intent

What Is a Breed Standard?

A breed standard is a detailed description of the perfect dog of that breed. Breeders use the standard as a guide in their breeding programs, and judges use it to evaluate the dogs in conformation shows. The standard is written by the national breed club, using guidelines established by the registry that recognizes the breed (such as the AKC or UKC).

The first section of the breed standard gives a brief overview of the breed's history. Then it describes the dog's general appearance and size as an adult. Next is a detailed description of the head and neck, then the back and body, and the front and rear legs. The standard then describes the ideal coat and how the dog should be presented in the show ring. It also lists all acceptable colors, patterns, and markings. Then there's a section on how the dog moves, called *gait*. Finally, there's a general description of the dog's temperament.

Each section also lists characteristics that are considered to be faults or disqualifications in the conformation ring. Superficial faults in appearance are often what distinguish a pet-quality dog from a show- or competition-quality dog. However, some faults affect the way a dog moves or his overall health. And faults in temperament are serious business.

You can read all the AKC breed standards at www.akc.org.

on getting a show-quality Golden Retriever, study the breed standard and then attend dog shows to see which Golden Retrievers are the ones who are winning. The best breeders have an eye for puppies who have the potential to become champions.

If you are certain you want to show your Golden, be sure to tell your breeder well before you are at the point of selecting your puppy. She will help you all the way through the process. If you are just looking for a great Golden friend, you will get a pet-quality puppy. But don't worry that you are getting second quality. Sometimes developing dogs make little adjustments away from

physical perfection; they can still be a great Golden Retriever and to an untrained eye will be just as lovely.

What does matter to anyone getting a Golden, and must never be accepted at a substandard level, is temperament. An aggressive or shy Golden puppy is substandard and should be avoided. Starting out with his best paw forward, your friendly, inquisitive, playful Golden will only improve with time and your loving attention.

Gold Medal Athletes

The ideal Golden Retriever is built for action. A sporting dog needs the correct structure for maximum athleticism so he can perform his job properly in the field. Even if your dog's sole purpose is to be a friend and companion, correct structure will help ensure an active life and great health. The strength and power described in the breed standard as "strong neck, broad front, straight legs, and correct angles" are required for a dog who might spend the day hunting and carrying birds through ground cover. These same qualities will guarantee him maximum athleticism while playing and spending active time with you in his everyday life.

General Appearance

Goldens look happy; they seem to nearly always have the dog equivalent of a smile on their face. The ideal Golden has a kindly expression and is eager, alert, and self-confident. He is symmetrical, powerful, and active, built for action—hunting—and shouldn't be clumsy or overly long-legged. Goldens in conformation shows are measured against the breed standard, but how well a dog is put together, how he moves, his fitness, and his attitude are all given more consideration than any of his individual features.

Beauty in Motion

Is there anything more beautiful to behold than a Golden Retriever in action? When trotting, his gait is free, smooth, powerful, and well coordinated, showing good reach. Viewed from any position, his legs turn neither in nor out, and his feet do not cross or interfere with each other while he is moving. A dog with proper structure will move correctly, and his fitness will improve through exercise, whereas a dog with poor structure may tire more easily and become sore or lame when exercising.



A Golden with proper structure will move elegantly and effortlessly.

Size

The ideal Golden is a midsize dog. Males measure 23 to 24 inches tall at the *withers* (the top point of the shoulder); females are 21½ to 22½ inches. Dogs who deviate more than 1 inch in height from the standard are disqualified in dog shows. The Golden should be slightly longer than he is tall.

The range for weight is 65 to 75 pounds for male Golden Retrievers and 55 to 65 pounds for females. The weight recommendations are meant for dogs of proper height who are in working condition. Obviously, an overweight dog or one suffering from poor nutrition will not fall within these weights. There is a tendency for Golden Retrievers to be larger (taller and heavier) than the standard allows, due to certain trends over the years, but an appropriately sized Golden is more suitable for the various jobs he performs and will be inclined toward better health.

All That Glitters

If there is one feature that truly defines the Golden Retriever, it is his coat and—most especially—his coat color: gold, of course! The variations observed in Golden Retriever coat color can cause confusion and lead us to ask the question: Just how gold *is* gold? Is reddish gold, or creamy, or nearly white gold still gold?



There are many possible shades of Golden gold.

According to the breed standard, a wide range of colors is permissible, from light to dark golden, and shade is really just a personal preference. Other than extremely pale or extremely dark, which are both considered undesirable, all the variations are allowed. Originally, most Goldens were darker gold, but during the last twenty years a lighter golden color has become more popular.

Feathering or *furnishings*—your dog's longer, flowing hair on his legs, body, and tail—may be lighter than the rest of the body. These light shadings are not to be confused with white markings. White markings anywhere on the body, other than a few white hairs on the chest, are considered a fault according to the breed standard. White markings anywhere on your Golden will not affect his quality as a loving companion or working dog, though, and the distinguished graying around the muzzle many aging Goldens develop is not penalized in the show ring.

Puppy Goldens are often lighter in their puppy coat than they will be once they shed and get their adult coat and color. A good way of guessing the adult color is to look at the darkest part of your puppy's ears; this is approximately what the adult body color will be.

Coat Quality

The Golden coat should act as a protection for this hunting breed, to protect him from the elements and the environment on land and in the water. Due to

its length, a Golden's coat will pick up burrs and seeds that would never be found on a Labrador Retriever or Chesapeake Bay Retriever. Many hunters choose to trim their Golden's furnishings during hunting season, but on a properly coated pet Golden there shouldn't be much of a problem.

The Golden Retriever has a *top coat*—the hairs you see—that is dense and water-repellent. This outer coat, which lies close to the body, may be straight or wavy and should be neither coarse nor silky. Excessive length, *open coats*—where the hair stands out from the body and looks overly fluffy—and limp, soft coats are very undesirable.

Another visible part of your dog's coat is his feathering, which develops as he matures. The feathering is the Golden's crowning glory. Feathering is the moderately long, fringelike hair on the backs of his forelegs and on his underbody as well as on the front of his neck, the backs of his thighs, and the underside of his tail.

Your Golden also has a second coat you cannot see, called the undercoat. The *undercoat* is made of softer, lighter-colored hair that helps insulate your dog in all weather conditions. In the summer the Golden's coat helps keep environmental heat away from him, and in the winter it helps hold his body heat in.

The coat should repel water, rather than soak it up like a sponge. A Golden with a proper coat will come out of the water, shake a couple of times, and be nearly dry. The coat on your Golden's head, paws, and front of the legs is short and even. If the Golden coat is wavy, these waves are usually on the hair along the back. Occasionally you see a truly curly Golden, with curls all over his body while the hair on his legs, face, and feathers is straight. This is no doubt a throwback to the Tweed Water Spaniel that was used during the initial development of the breed (see chapter 2 for more on the history of the Golden).



That gorgeous coat should not be silky or fluffy. It was developed to protect a working dog.