

THE TIBETAN MASTIFF

PUPPY TO YOUNG ADULT

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The first two years of your Tibetan Mastiff's life will be an adventure for both of you because the TM is not an "easy" or inherently cooperative breed. Slow to mature but very intelligent and primitive, a puppy poses certain challenges to even the most experienced pet owners. A number of the behaviors I discuss may not apply to your puppy, but it is likely that you will recognize your puppy in the general descriptions I offer of puppy development.

The most important time in a Tibetan Mastiff's life is the first two years during which he will go through three distinct phases. The timing of the phases varies a bit from puppy to puppy, but you can recognize the changes and prepare for them so that your puppy can grow into an adult that is a pleasure to own and know.

At about ten weeks of age, your puppy will come home with you. I prefer to keep the puppies until they are close to ten weeks to allow them a bit more time to mature and gain confidence through their interaction with the rest of the litter and the adult dogs. The proper temperament for an adult TM is relaxed, watchful and somewhat aloof with strangers but your puppy will need guidance to gain the self-confidence that he needs so that he won't become a challenging and aggressive dog. Much of temperament is genetic, but the balance is clearly environmental. Most people are aware that puppies go through various "fear" stages, but understanding that "emotion" in your TM puppy is critical. Molding your puppy into a companion and friend will take patience but will be well worth the time invested.



When your puppy comes home, he will be a bit unsettled and may go through a period of separation anxiety. The presence of other pets in the home can be helpful in eliminating the "loneliness". The truth is that the puppy is feeling displaced and uncertain - not "lonely" as we think of it. Learning his new space and family will be the key to his comfort, so keep the puppy's exposure to new people and events within his abilities. Meeting new people, going places, even new smells will be intense experiences for a young puppy. Although the puppy is young, he is still a Tibetan Mastiff and will already feel an instinctive need to control his situation. Make sure that you introduce the puppy to new people and have them wait until the puppy has had a "sniff" and a minute to evaluate them before approaching. Allowing strangers to pick him up or handle him without an introduction will make your puppy uncomfortable - even if he doesn't act bothered by it. This is especially important at the veterinarian's office where those unfamiliar with the Tibetan Mastiff character may make him so uneasy as a puppy that it will be difficult to get him in the front door of the office later. Many times new puppy owners feel embarrassed if the puppy is not highly approachable and this embarrassment can create tension that your puppy will sense and respond to. Try to be relaxed and self-confident in new situations, so your puppy can relax as well.

One of the most common mistakes that new owners make is avoiding activities that the puppy doesn't like to do. If your puppy doesn't take to riding in cars, it is a good idea to work with that problem before he is over 100 pounds and you have to wrestle him into the car to go to the vet. Many puppies are carsick or experience motion sickness at first. Much of this is brought on by the anxiety of being "out of control". Sometimes, just sitting in the car for a few minutes is the first step, followed by short trips, which increase in duration until your TM can settle and ride without concern. If you drive a large enough vehicle to accommodate a crate, then you will find that your puppy will travel most safely that way. In no case should you ever travel with your puppy or dog in the back of an open truck.

Collars, Leash Training and Crating



Sometimes a puppy may rebel against leash training. Again, the reason is that he is being forced to give up some control.

To make your puppy comfortable on a leash, you should select a well-fitted flat collar preferably with no noisy tags or medallions on it. Dangling items are distracting to the puppy and he will sometimes scratch at the collar to remove it. Once your puppy has had the collar on and is comfortable with it, try attaching a leash. I personally like a flexi-lead for puppies because the flexi-lead will allow the puppy more latitude in movement at first. Many times a puppy will follow an adult dog on a leash so if you have another adult dog or a friend who can walk their dog with you, that may help get him accustomed to walking on leash. Try to keep the puppy walking on your left side as his training progresses and get him accustomed to being under control without pulling.

As your puppy grows, use caution in the selection of leashes and collars. Check them for wear as TMs have been known to strip out a flexi-lead and break a weakened collar or leash. My TM puppies also like to chew collars off of each other. **Never** use a choke collar on your Tibetan Mastiff puppy as you can easily injure him.

Leash Training and Housebreaking

The need for leash training is obvious, but it is also helpful in house breaking. I suggest that you take your puppy out on a leash to relieve himself. This will help him to make the connection between going outside and his purpose there. In many cases, puppies that are just "let out" in the yard will play only to then come back in the house after a time and relieve themselves. When your puppy does what you have taken him out to do, praise him, take him back inside and then you can let him out for play. Another technique that works well is to tie a bell to the door through which you will take puppy out. If you tap the bell on the way out, the puppy will eventually learn to do the same when he wants to go out. This can save damage to your door from scratches.



Crate training is a sensitive subject for many people. Generally, people do not like to be confined and we project that on our dogs. In fact, dogs are animals that have a den instinct and like to have a little place of their own. The Tibetan Mastiff puppy is very mischievous and can cause quite a lot of damage in your home if left unsupervised or uncrated. Again, you may have to kennel your dog one day or leave him overnight at the vet's - so let's teach him to be comfortable in a crate. Leaving his crate set up in a quiet spot where he can see what's going on and fastening the door open so he can't get closed in by accident are good ideas. You can start by offering your puppy a special toy or treat only when he goes in his crate. Be prepared for some resistance when you first close the door on the crate. He may whine, cry, bark or howl to get out. Do your best to wait until the racket stops before letting him come out. If he thinks that throwing a fit will get him released - he will continue to throw a fit. Please understand that your puppy will not "hate" you although the "Legendary Guardian" may just get a bit pouty for not getting his way. You must draw the line with your puppy unless you plan to be his pet.

Allotting enough time for early puppy training can save you a lot of frustration and heartache and strengthen the bond between you and your new best friend. Patience and perseverance will yield a puppy that enjoys a jaunty leash walk and can easily be crated when the need arises.

By the time your puppy is four months old, you should be able to travel with him in a car, walk him on a leash and crate him fairly easily. While he is learning these good habits - watch that he doesn't pick up some bad ones along the way. However "cute" his behavior may be as a puppy, he is developing behaviors that will be the foundation of his adult conduct.

Chewing

Puppy chewing is a common complaint. TM pups have a special fondness for wood and are not averse to cutting their teeth on your fine furniture. This is another reason for crate training, as in most cases TMs cannot be "trusted" not to damage your property. The most common complaints are items of a personal nature that are damaged or destroyed including: eyeglasses, pagers, remote controls, shoes, etc. in addition to furniture and fabrics. Even as puppies, TMs can be amazingly destructive, especially if they become bored. TM puppies also have been purported to climb to the highest point in a room (they are mountain dogs, after all!) including perching regally on the dresser or dining room table. No, I'm not kidding.



While your puppy is four to six months old, he will be cutting his adult teeth and will be even more inclined to chew. I like to give puppies green willow branches to chew as the wood is not especially hard and the willow bark has certain medicinal properties to ease gum pain. Of course, willow branches make a mess in the house, so please make sure puppy doesn't "sneak" one in. During this same time your puppy may become an erratic eater due to gum pain. This is also a time when puppies tend to play hard enough to hurt themselves if not carefully monitored. Of course, no large breed puppies should be allowed to jump onto or off of decks, steps, and furniture or bound into or out of an automobile without assistance.

Barking



At about five to seven months, puppies sometimes begin to be a barking nuisance. The breed has been barking to warn predators or just for the joy of it for a couple of thousand years - so you will have to expect a bit of barking. Train your dog to stop barking on command if you can. If not, you will have to bring him in at night to prevent sleepless nights. The breed is very alert after dark and even a small disturbance may yield a barking episode. In my view de-barking the dog is terribly cruel and really unnecessary with training. No bark collars can work with some dogs, but it is cruel to leave them on continuously. Barking and Tibetan Mastiffs are almost synonymous, so you should be prepared to work with, but not eliminate, that behavior.

At seven to ten months a number of significant changes will take place with your puppy. First, he will begin to act a little less like a puppy and will become more independent. You may find that the puppy that previously came when you called him or seemed somewhat interested in pleasing you, has a new agenda . . . pleasing himself. Digging, climbing and chewing can continue to be problems, but the additional concern of sexual maturity begins to emerge. The males will begin to act more protective at about this time and the females can be "all over the map" emotionally. Your female may experience her first estrus (heat cycle) as early as six to seven months, although the age of nine to twelve months is more common. This time is very important with a female puppy and distinct character changes have been noted after the first estrus. This stress is more intense because the breed has a single, annual estrus, which directs them to have a strong and persistent desire to breed. In my view, under no circumstances, should a first year male or female be bred. It is not possible to be certain of the health of the dogs and the female's character can be forever changed. Of course the physical strain on a female of about a year to carry, deliver and raise puppies is obvious. The emotional strain is just as profound. Keep your puppy under close observation during this critical time. Temper guardiness and watch for aggressive behavior toward other dogs and toward people.

Food Issues

ALL Tibetan Mastiffs have issues with food. Food is a means of sorting out pack order and a young dog may show any of a number of food related behaviors. These behaviors are commonly overlooked so I will describe some things to watch for - even if you crate your dog or separate him to feed him. You may notice any of the following:

- a kind of stillness and watchfulness when food is presented
- circling of the food dish repeatedly, especially with the head down
- lifting or moving the food dish
- dumping or burying uneaten food or empty food dishes
- resting with the food dish between the front paws, sometimes with the head resting in the dish
- grumbling or growling while eating or when the food dish is removed
- rapid gulping of food
- refusal to eat at all
- sitting with and guarding the food dish, including racing over to it when anyone else approaches



I cannot over-emphasize the importance of dealing with your dog's food issues. Recognition is the first step in dealing with your dog's expression of food anxiety. The outcome of these issues if unaddressed can range from anorexia in dogs that only guard their food and refuse to eat to full-fledged food aggression in which no one can approach an empty food bowl. These circumstances can affect your dog's health and can result in injury. Make sure that your dog stays relaxed and confident when food is placed in front of him; be sure that you can pick up the food bowl and/or biscuits and other treats without his becoming aggressive. You may have to pet the dog and talk to him while he eats to get him comfortable with your presence and the sound of your voice. Dogs that won't eat in the presence of other dogs are a very special problem and may have to be fed by themselves. These dogs often starve themselves if left in a kennel because they cannot find the privacy they need to "let go" and eat. Many times, the same kind of dog will also go quite some time before relieving themselves in a new place. This type of tension can be difficult for both of you.

This brings me to the next phase of your dog's development, which focuses on young adult behavior and socialization. At a younger age, socializing your puppy just means introducing him carefully to new situations and helping to build his self-confidence. At ten to fourteen months the focus of socializing your puppy changes. He now looks almost like an adult and your expectations of his ability to behave well are pretty well set. During this time he will start to assume his job as guardian in a more serious manner. He may begin to be more "on guard" when at home, in the car or on a leash. He is determining his territory and his responsibilities. This is a time when dogs that have been kept too much at home may begin to act aggressive toward visitors to your

home. The dog that walked casually on a leash, may begin to growl at other dogs or people that he sees as a possible threat. Guiding your dog's behavior during this time can make all the difference in his adult behavior. Let him know that he is a good dog and that you appreciate his guarding you but also let him know when he can relax and just continue watching. You can say, "Okay, boy, you're fine - it's okay now". Whenever possible, introduce him to the person or thing that got his attention so he will know that you are paying attention to his concerns. Once, a young male that I own was walking through a motel lobby at a dog show and had a serious moment with a large carved wooden horse that was a part of the décor. At the same time that the scene was quite comical, I had to be careful not to dismiss his concern and patiently take him to the carving so he could see it was not a threat. Really, your puppy is just learning the world and he will live to protect you from any and every threat.



Between fourteen months and two years, your puppy will mature physically and will begin to resemble the dog he will become at three to four years of age. Your dog's behaviors should be fairly predictable and manageable. You will have discovered that your Tibetan Mastiff is not going to let people enter the house or car in your absence. You will have developed a protocol for introducing him to new situations and new people so that he can evaluate his role. At about two years of age, if your dog is of breeding quality and has had all of the routine health checks, you may decide that you want to breed him or her. I hope you will let your breeder help with that decision. Ultimately, the choice and the responsibility are yours if you purchased a breeding quality puppy. There are decided changes in behavior after breeding. The males become quite alert and sexually motivated for several weeks following their first mating. They are really grown up now and want the world to recognize what they see as elevated pack status. The females if they are bred and conceive go through an entire palette of emotions and hopefully go on to become wonderful mothers. Again, they are profoundly changed by the experience. If you choose not to breed your dog, the decision to spay or neuter is a sound one. Females are a real nuisance when in season and the males are happier and easier to manage when neutered. The only reason to breed your dog should be that he has something special to contribute to the Tibetan Mastiff breed. Every breeder must take responsibility for every puppy they produce for the life of the puppy - so it is not a matter to enter into without a lot of guidance and thought.