

The Labrador Retriever

Personality Characteristics

Labrador Retrievers are many things to many people.... Companion, helper, friend, service dog, detection dog, hunter, competitor, but first and foremost, they are a retriever. In an attempt to please you, they will perform many duties, however, make no mistake, they are a hunting retriever to the bone! Hunting, swimming and fetching are in their genes, right down to their webbed feet.

LABS ARE PEOPLE- ORIENTED

Labs have to be in tune with their people in order to follow directions to birds that have fallen out of their sight. That's great for people who like constant canine companionship. It's bad for people who expect a dog to entertain himself. Some hunting dogs were created to hunt independently of humans. Terriers and hounds, for example, follow their noses or eyes and the person must try to keep up. Not so with the Lab. A good retriever must be attentive to the hunter. A retriever that ignores the hunter's commands could swim past a fallen bird and just keep going. The ability to attend to and follow directions is critical for a good hunting retriever, and it's one reason Labs are such outstanding obedience and service dogs. But it's also one reason some Labs don't work out for some families. A dog that innately looks to humans for leadership needs human interaction. All dogs are sociable, but Labs are even more so than the average dog. They do not cope well with being banished to the backyard. Even when locked in a luxury home, they may do their best to escape in an effort to find their missing people. A family without time to devote to a Lab may soon find itself with a runaway Lab or a very unhappy, destructive dog. "Labradors are versatile dogs, and whatever their role, their most important priority is to be with their human companions," explains Peggy Roesner of Midwest Labrador Retriever Rescue in Woodstock, Illinois. "Labs behave as though the sun rises and sets on their owners. Their devotion is an amazing thing," Roesner says. "Labs love their people and want to be with them:" adds Nancy Parks of Desert Labrador Retriever Rescue in Phoenix, Arizona. "They're not happy out in the yard and will bark and dig to show their displeasure. When finally let in, they will jump up to get in your face, and knock over kids. The happy tail will knock over stuff on the coffee table. They are happy, upbeat, and the tail always wags!"

LABS ARE ACTIVE

Labs have to be active to accompany a hunter from dawn to dusk, running, swimming and retrieving. That high energy level is great for active people who like to run, swim and play fetch. But it can be disastrous for people who like to sit, relax and watch television. These inactive people often label their dogs as hyperactive, but the dogs are really just doing what they were bred to do. People tend to overestimate the time they can devote to

their dog, and as the excitement of playing with a new puppy subsides, the dog may be left to entertain itself. Adult Labs need 30 to 60 minutes of interactive exercise every morning and every evening. You can't just put a Lab in the yard while you're cooking dinner; because Labs tend not to exercise themselves, at least not in constructive ways.

They may bark, chew and dig, but most owners interpret that as unruly behavior, not exercise. Labs only get appropriate **direction.** exercise when it's directed by a person—walking, hiking, swimming or retrieving. Don't think bad weather is an excuse to take the day off; the typical Lab thinks a Category 5 hurricane only makes the outing more invigorating. Water is fun! “A walk around the block just doesn't do it. They need to get out and run, stretch their legs and run off some energy,” Parks explains. Even then, the typical Lab is ready for more. “A good Lab will chill out when owners are working or busy, but if you get up, so does the dog, ‘Where are we going?’” Parks adds. That's just the adults. Puppies are even more energetic. Parks cautions, “People don't remember their last Lab as a puppy. They don't remember the high energy level and chewed shoes. They get a new puppy and compare that dog with their last Lab and it just doesn't compare.” Labs get big fast, so people often assume that a puppy is a full-grown dog, but as big as it is, it's still just an untrained baby. This leads to people relegating their dogs to the yard when they get too big for the house, and it also leads to unrealistic expectations when it comes to training. “Labs are a very active breed and often don't settle down from their puppy- like antics until they are approaching 3 years of age (and sometimes, never!)” Roesner says.

LABS ARE ORALLY ORIENTED

“Hunting Labs often possess an innate drive to retrieve; they are focused dogs and take their job of retrieval seriously. Those just as driven to retrieve a tennis ball over and over again,” Roesner says. Labs were developed to use their jaws like a strong and dexterous hand. In the absence of birds to retrieve, they'll mouth and carry just about anything in reach. That's great for people who like to play fetch or compete in advanced obedience competitions. It's bad for those who don't give their Labs an outlet for its need to carry and manipulate objects in its mouth. “Labs are oral, active dogs, which becomes immediately apparent,” Roesner explains. “Any objects within their reach become fair game to be toted around and most likely, chewed beyond recognition. Of course, the same mouthy behavior is part of what makes them good retrievers.”

That oral fixation leads to a complaint common to many Lab owners. “Labs can be destructive,” Roesner explains. “They are natural chewers, and if you don't make provisions for this tendency by use of a crate, dogproofing your home, vigilant supervision and opportunities for exercise, there will most likely be some unhappy consequences. The Lab isn't being naughty or spiteful; more likely, the behaviors are those of a dog that may be bored, lonely or lacking in exercise. The dog amuses itself in the way that comes naturally: chewing.” The inclination to hold things in the mouth often includes human arms and hands, Parks points out. “They mouth you, which some people take to be a bite.” Labs must be trained out of this mouthiness. “A Lab puppy truly resembles a little fur-bearing piranha Roesner says. “They trot around with an open mouth looking for something, someone, anything to clamp on to. As they get older, they

have a tendency to grab arms or clothing. This is inappropriate behavior that should be stopped before it develops into a more undesirable behavior of dominance,” Roesner says. For example, Roesner tells the story of an elderly man who relinquished his young Lab to rescue when he could no longer handle him because of his weakened health and confinement to a wheelchair. “The Lab would take many inappropriate liberties with the man—grabbing at his pants, and grabbing his arm in his mouth and pulling;” Roesner says. “The dog had not been taught that this was inappropriate behavior. Once in rescue, this dog demonstrated a lack of impulse control, which resulted in biting when he was fearful or insecure,” Roesner adds. “Had the mouthing been extinguished when the dog was young, one wonders if his behavior would have developed differently. Because of the natural tendency to be oral, Labs need early understanding of what they can and cannot put in their mouths. To fulfill that oral need, provide ample toys and chewables,” she says. Parks had a Lab named Chance who was fixated on toys. “I shoved a ball in his mouth when we went anyplace. He was happier with something in his mouth—a ball or a toy. He didn’t chew the toys, but it acted like a pacifier—kind of like my dad and his pipe!”

LABS ARE VACUUMS

A Lab’s oral fixation can lead to health problems if it eats objects or poisons. “Labs tend to eat anything that does not eat them first,” Roesner says. “Anything is edible in the world of a Lab!” Labs have been known to swallow rocks, knives, balls, toys, rawhide, socks, mulch, even car seatbelts and snowmobile seats! Pretty much anything that can fit down their throat gets to take a tour of their tummy. “Some ‘specialists’ among the breed love to de-stuff pillows, sofa cushions, toys and an occasional car interior when left to their own devices;” Roesner says. Roesner’s first Labrador, a chocolate girl named Boomer, taught her just how smart and destructive a Lab can be. “I came home from work one day to discover that my pine dining-room table had been minimized to three legs and one wall in my kitchen had been stripped of wallpaper;” Roesner recalls. “She was also capable of delicate surgery—every squeak toy was totally de-squeaked. She carefully removed the squeaker from each toy without any damage to the rest of it.” “A friend’s Lab ate an entire store-bought pie—wrapper and all;” Parks says. “The plastic wrapper fortunately came out the other end. The same Lab and three of his housemates helped themselves to 10 loaves of bread on the kitchen counter” Have a Lab that won’t lose weight no wonder

10 Real Reasons TO OWN A LAB

- 1. You like the moisturizing effect of a slobber-coated tennis ball on your hands.*
- 2. You like being awakened by a tennis ball dropped on your face.*
- 3. You like the convenience of never having to clean up dropped food.*
- 4. You like the challenge of keeping your balance when sliding on water flung from the drinking bowl all over the kitchen floor.*
- 5. You like the surprise of a water sprinkler—still in action—being pulled inside through the doggie door.*

6. *You like the smell of a wet dog.*
7. *You like to be stared at while you nap or go to the bathroom.*
8. *You like to hear your neighbors say, "But I thought all Labs were smart!"*
9. *You like to feel guilty every time you leave the house without your dog.*
10. *You like developing a throwing arm that would get you into most minor league baseball teams.*

Lab on a diet who wouldn't lose weight. Theo's secret was discovered when he was caught swallowing a backyard squirrel—whole! It's also important to supervise your Lab while it's chewing its own doggie toys. "Rawhide can become dangerous with an unsupervised Lab," Roesner says. "Many dogs will try to swallow huge portions of the rawhide whole, which can create the potential for choking or bowel obstruction."

LABS NEED TRAINING

Labs must be able to follow human directions to find birds, but even without directions they don't give up. A good hunting Lab will take matters upon itself to find a way to get what it wants. That's good for people who need a service dog that can think for itself in novel situations. It's bad for people who provide no direction at all. Labs don't train themselves at least, not necessarily in a good way. Herein lies one of the main problems with new Lab owners. Many of those attracted to Labs have been influenced by interacting with a neighbor's wonderfully trained companion, by seeing a service dog fail to realize that none of those Labs came trained! These Labs do wonderful things because they were trained to do them. "We've all seen mellow Labs with laid-back temperaments. This image sticks in people's minds when they decide they want a Lab," Roesner says. That can cause problems when the new owners don't train them. "Dogs are often relinquished by their owners when they discover that Labs do not automatically come with these characteristics," Roesner continues. "This breed requires a good deal of attention, training, consistency and nurturing from their humans to realize their potential as great dogs. Labs have the necessary temperament and ammunition to be amazing companions, but this is only achieved through time, work and love provided by the owner."

LABS ARE WATER- LOVERS

Labs don't just tolerate water, but adore it in all its forms: frigid, muddy, raining down from the sky or spraying up from the sprinklers. This is wonderful for people who have access to safe swimming areas. It can be irritating for those who are sticklers for immaculately clean and dry homes. If you have a pool, be prepared for non-stop Lab belly flops and wet-dog shaks your dog has access to the house, be prepared to share some of the water fun. "They love to come back to you while wet and shake. They have no sense of personal space!" Parks exclaims. "I've heard of I bringing in a running sprinkler through the doggie door—not a good thing!"

What if you don't have a pool or pond? Set up a kiddie wading pool. Others you may find your Lab standing with many feet as can fit in its water bowl!

LABS ARE HUNTERS

Labs don't just wait for the hunt direct them to fallen game. They must be attentive so they can mark the fall themselves. Breeder Erin McClurg of Dallas, Texas believes the Lab's hunting heritage makes it more aware of its surroundings "In a hunting situation the Labrador is at his master's side waiting for the command find the bird. When they are at home are waiting patiently for the next task--- whether it is sleeping with you, or going the park to walk, anything." Not all Labs are content to let the hunter do all the hunting. "Many Labs have strong prey drives," Roesner explains. (A *prey drive* is an animal's instinctive need to chase after prey—for Labs, this is usually in the form of birds and small furry critters, or even cats.) "They are more than willing to chase a rabbit or other fast-moving small animal at the drop of a hat." Hunting also shapes the way Labs interact with other dogs. Hunting retrievers must often share a small blind or boat with other dogs. Fighting is definitely not welcome in those close quarters! So the typical Lab is neither aggressive nor fearful, along well with strange dogs.

LABS ARE INDIVIDUALS

"When Labs demonstrate high-energy behavior, chewing everything in their reach, pulling on the leash and chasing fast-moving objects, we must remember that these are normal behaviors. If these behaviors continue, it is because the owner has not worked on training or containment. Again, this is a human error for which the Labrador will pay dues. Those dues are in the form of punishment, isolation or relinquishment to a shelter," Roesner says. Labs are like a box of chocolates—and yellows and blacks—you never know what you'll get. Every Lab is different, and some scarcely act like Labs at all! Some avoid water as though it were battery acid; some spit out anything in their mouths. Labs do tend to have one thing in common: They are wonderful dogs that cannot help but do what their genes tell them. •

Problem Lab

Problem: Your Lab needs more attention.

Solution: Make time for your Lab just as you make time for other important things in your life. If you must be away from home too long, hire a pet-sitter to play with your dog or enroll your Lab in doggie day care.

Problem: Your Lab needs more activity.

Solution: Get up, get outside and get going! Schedule a regular walk every evening and a game every morning. Enroll in agility or obedience classes, and exercise your Lab's mind, as well as its body. Tired Labs are good Labs.

Problem: Your Lab is destructive

Solution: Give your dog more attention and more activity. Causes of destructive behavior range from boredom and pent-up energy to frustration and separation anxiety. It could also be from lack of acceptable objects to carry and chew. Lots of retrieving games can help most of these problems. Chew toys that require the dog to work at getting food treats out of them can also fulfill the need for oral satisfaction.

Problem: Your Lab doesn't mind you.

Solution: All Labs need training. Enroll in a training class.

Problem: Your Lab doesn't seem fulfilled.

Solution: Give your Lab a job. Better yet take your Lab hunting.

Article by:

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What Do They Look Like?

A Labrador Retriever can be bred to look different ways for different purposes. Basically, the All American Lab has a soft double coat, made of two distinct layers, next to their skin is a fuzzy undercoat that is a remarkable insulator in cold weather or icy water and on top a more course outer coat that serves to protect them from brush and weeds as well as to help shed water. Then theres the tail! Much like an otter's tail it is thick at the base and tapers toward the end, used to help steer while swimming, maintain balance when running and beat one about the legs to show love and devotion (it is also at a perfect height to sweep any items off your coffee table). A Labs tail is held level, not curled over the back, nor should it droop. Their head is beautiful, clean and well formed, broad for a large brain capacity with ears hanging close to the head. A fun thing to show the kids, is the webs between their toes, just like a duck, makes for great swimmers.

A Lab is a dog of a thousand expressions, and when you are around them for a while you can tell what they are thinking just buy looking at the expression on their face. Kindness and intelligence combined with friendliness is the hallmark of their expression and this speaks loudly of one of their best characteristics..... their temperment.

A Labs Temperment

Probably the one thing that distinguishes a Lab above other dogs is their temperment. They are people dogs, it makes them happy to make you happy, and hope to impress you with all types of things that they find. Well, after all, they are a retriever! So why not retrieve things like shoes and boots, shovels, buckets, cats, flowers, hoses and the like. Most Labs will let your children pull on their ears and tail (although that is not a good idea) lay on top of them, or share their food dish, all in all, a fantastic family dog that will quickly win your heart and make it difficult to scold or reprimand a innocent act like

digging up your favorite rose. Your Lab is possessive and will readily bark to announce the arrival of company, however they tend not to be guard dogs. It doesn't matter if it is a burglar or Uncle Fred your Lab will greet them, see if they have anything to eat, then proceed to engage them in a game of "toss the tennis ball", the worst one might expect from the average Lab is to be licked to death if they sit still long enough. They are not a nervous dog, but stable, loyal and calm. They are great explorers and will carelessly wander off following some trail and just keep going, make sure you have good ID on your best friend because they can be very happy romping after someone jogging or riding a bike, only to wind up in the local dog slammer.

Folks will ask if a Lab is an escape artist. They are not renowned for this as a breed, although individual Labradors can be clever at escaping. Some can be good at opening doors and latches. A six-foot fence properly grounded will keep a Labrador from jumping, although many Labradors will never jump a four-foot fence perimeter. Because they can chew a lot, take care that your enclosure cannot be chewed through. They can also be good climbers, so check for possible footholds the dog could use to haul himself up (for example, check if a doghouse provides a platform from which to jump a fence).

Usually Labradors are not noisy. Bored Labradors can be, but excessive barking is not generally typical of the breed. Labradors often give a warning bark in response to an unusual event that they feel needs your attention, such as "Hey, a car pulled into the driveway!" Both sexes make good pets. In general, male Labradors are more dependent and females are somewhat independent. For example, if you are at home working on your computer, your male Labrador will probably sleep right under your feet while your female will probably sleep in the other room and just come in and check on you periodically.

As we said, they are people dogs and love being around you. Left alone they can become bored, frustrated and then destructive. It can be said that a Lab does not live on bread alone.... They require your attention and in turn will bend over backwards to please you. That is, if they know what pleases you! Labs are easy and fun to train and it's a great way to get to know your dog, and for them to know you. Your Lab needs exercise as much or more than you do. It has been said that a Lab is a stomach on four legs.... This is true! We never allow our Labs to eat "free choice", but restrict them starting with the guidelines printed on the bag of food you are feeding, that is if you are feeding a commercial food. Uh-Oh, I'm going down a rabbit trail here, back to temperament. Given the right balance of food, exercise, training and attention, your Lab will be happy and healthy, a joy to be around.

A Lab with the correct Lab temperament is never hyperactive. Individual dogs can be. Given the popularity of the breed, many people are "backyard breeding", without the regard for temperament that a breeder will usually give. If a female Lab begins to show signs of heat, a male is generally found within the neighborhood..... "Does he have papers", they ask? If so the agreement is made the dogs are bred and the offspring are dispersed through an ad in the local newspaper. Hyper dogs will produce hyper pups. In recent years, an entire new class of temperament has come about this way. Buyers must be cautious to look at the parents, play with them, spend some time with them. Ask for

names of people who have previously purchased dogs from the breeder, then contact those people for a recommendation. You will readily discern hyperactivity in the dogs if it is there.

This is not to be confused with the fact that a Lab is an active dog. Actually a Lab is a puppy until they are 2 years old. So think of this, you will have a dog that is a puppy regardless of their size. A typical Lab will gain full skeleton growth by 18 months of age and then will fill out for another year. Somewhere in that time frame they begin to be an adult dog mentally. Too often the term “hyper” is given to a dog that is simply being a normal healthy puppy. This statement can only be proven sadly by going to Craig’s List on the Web and looking under the pets category, see how many pups from 6 months to 18 months are attempted to be “rehomed” because of some obscure reason. Often the real reason is that the owner just can’t handle the pup, won’t spend time with the pup, won’t train the pup and refuses to spend the time to learn how. Many times the bad lessons learned at this critical time in a pup’s development are strongly imprinted and limit that pup from ever achieving its full potential.

Come the point where you have decided to get a Lab puppy, you need to do some homework before you start talking to breeders and certainly before you look at any puppies. You need to make some decisions about what sex and color you’d like. What you plan to do with the dog. What kind of temperament you’d like. Once you have some answers to those questions, you should discuss your concerns and ideas with breeders. After you have found a breeder you like, then allow the breeder to help you select your puppy. Most breeders have a pretty good idea of what the puppies’ personalities are like and will guide you to a good choice. Considerations concerning Lab health problems must be made. Hip dysplasia can be a problem, so be sure to look for breeders that certify their dogs through OFA or PennHip. PRA, a disease causing blindness, is also present in the breed, so dogs must be examined yearly by a veterinary ophthalmologist. Labradors are prone to mild skin allergies in some regions of the US, notably Southern California. Ear infections are always a potential problem with hanging ears. You can minimize the potential for health problems by choosing the breeder of your puppy carefully.

Care and Upkeep

Labs are not real bad shedders, but you will notice hair loss as the seasons change. Usually a good brushing once a week will keep their coat shiny and soft. Clipping toenails is something you will want to do and a canine nail clipper is readily available in any pet store, your vet or breeder can show you the best way to clip nails. If your best friend gets dusty or muddy simply take the hose to them (they will love that) and when dry just brush them out. A Lab’s coat has some magical property that helps them stay clean (now if we could only figure that out for our vehicles....). When they start to smell bad that is the time for a full blown bath with shampoo, you must be careful of too much shampooing as it will remove the natural oils in your Lab’s coat. It’s those oils that help keep his coat clean and dry, generally Labs are low maintenance.

Breeding Your Lab

Biggest question is what color will I get if I decide to breed my Lab. Labradors come in three colors: black, chocolate, and yellow. Yellow Labradors are often mistakenly called "golden Labradors." The term yellow refers to a range of color from nearly white to gold to fox-red. Black, chocolate, and yellow are the only correct colors. While mis-marked purebred Labradors are possible, be wary of those selling "rare" Labradors of other colors at exorbitant prices. There are yellow Labradors that are so pale they appear white, but they are still considered "yellow" and will usually have some color, even if it is only on the ear tips. "White" (very light yellow) Labradors are not unusual nor rare and should not command a significant price hike. The same goes for "fox red" (very dark yellow) Labradors. "Silver" Labradors are purely a scam and are either crosses with Weimaraners or very light chocolates. An actual silver Labrador (a dilute chocolate) would be treated as a mismarked dog and *not* command a high price. Variations in the color of yellow Labradors, however, are not penalized, but treated the same as any other yellow Labrador.

The question is often asked about what color to expect when breeding Labradors. Well, you can get yellows from blacks and blacks from yellows. Similarly, you can get chocolates from blacks or yellows and vice-versa. It all depends on what color genes the parents carry. The only absolutes are that if both parents are yellow, the resulting puppies are always yellow, never black or chocolate; if both parents are chocolate, you can get yellow or chocolate puppies but never black ones. Aside from the color itself, there are no differences. Many people feel that black Labs are better hunters, yellow dogs are lazier, and chocolate dogs are hardheaded and stubborn. None of this is true. The reason is pure genetics. Coat color in normally colored Labs is determined by two genes unrelated to anything else about the dog. It is perfectly possible to get all three colors in the same litter, therefore the notion that there is a color based difference in temperament and/or ability just doesn't make much sense.

Two sets of genes, not one, control a Lab's coloration. One set of genes controls whether the Lab will be dark (either black or chocolate) or light (yellow). Dark is dominant over light. Thus a Lab whose genotype is EE (homozygous dominant) or Ee (heterozygous) will be dark; only Labs that are ee (homozygous recessive) can be light.

The second set of genes only come into play if the Lab is dark (either EE or Ee). This set controls whether the Lab is black (the dominant trait) or chocolate (the recessive trait). Thus, a dark dog (ie. EE/Ee) that is BB (homozygous dominant) or Bb (heterozygous) will be black, while the only way a dog can be chocolate is for it to be dark (EE/Ee) AND bb (homozygous recessive).

So now, the possibilities for black dogs are EE BB , EE Bb , Ee BB , or Ee Bb . The possibilities for a yellow dog are ee BB , ee Bb , or ee bb . And the possibilities for a chocolate dog are EE bb or Ee bb . Remember that puppies will get one E/e from the dam and one from the sire, as well as one B/b from the dam and one from the sire to make up their complete "code". If you had two parents that were both Ee Bb (black in appearance), you can get all three colors in the resulting litter! Furthermore, when you realize that a pair of yellows can only give their puppies the ee combination, you understand why two

yellows only produce yellows. In a similar fashion, two chocolates can only bequeath bb to their puppies, so two chocolates can never produce a black puppy.

The eebb is an interesting case, as this is a yellow dog with chocolate pigmentation on its nose and eyerims. A dog that is bb always has this pigmentation. Under the current standard, a yellow with chocolate pigmentation is disqualified.

This is a yellow Labrador with chocolate pigmentation (eebb), is called a Dudley. It can also refer to a Lab with absolutely no pigmentation on the nose or eyerims (all pink in color), but in actuality, this is extremely rare, and probably a genetic abnormality. Some Labs will have a pinkish nose, this happens with many breeds, actually. It is called "winter nose" or "snow nose." Many yellow Labs will have dark noses in the summer that fade somewhat in the winter and repeat the cycle the next year. It is not understood why this happens. You can see it in many northern breeds such as Huskies and Malamutes as well. This is not considered a fault in any of these breeds and is not penalized. To differentiate between Labs with faded noses and Dudleys, check the eyerims and gum tissue of the dogs. A Dudley will have only light pink or tan skin; the other dogs will have black pigment in these areas.