

Is a Giant Schnauzer the Right Dog for You?

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Before you buy a Giant Schnauzer puppy, Think: What do I want my dog to be like? How will this dog fit into my lifestyle? What is my living situation? Consider what your needs are and what the dog's needs are. Do they conflict? Think of the dogs you've enjoyed owning in the past. Were they easy-going or intense? Self-willed, or independent? Out-going or reserved? Placid or energetic?

The Giant Schnauzer is an extremely intelligent, large, energetic, strongly territorial dog whose life is oriented toward his owners. If he is the right dog for you, he is one of the most rewarding breeds to own, but this is also a demanding breed, and should not be casually added to a household.

Will you enjoy owning a Giant Schnauzer? If you are looking for a bright, sensitive, responsive dog with whom you will be able to spend time, whom you will enjoy grooming, whom you plan to train; if you are looking for a protective, loyal dog who will be devoted to you and your family for the rest of his life - then perhaps you would enjoy owning a Giant. No one can describe a dog completely in words. When you get to know a member of any breed, your personalities will click or they won't, and that's what you're looking for: a breed you can spontaneously enjoy. Nevertheless, a word picture can indicate whether or not this is a breed you would like to get to know more about.

The Giant Schnauzer is a guard dog. He feels that one of his jobs is to protect his family. You don't need to train him to do this; it comes naturally to him. He will be watchful of people on your property, expressing suspicion with a low growl. Giants take life seriously, they aren't happy-go-lucky types who will go wagging up to everyone. However, they quickly learn to differentiate between strangers and friends and relatives who visit you frequently, greeting the latter folks graciously at the door. A guard dog has a strong sense of territory. And you shouldn't expect your male Giant to tolerate any other male in your house - he has to be number one.

A Giant Schnauzer needs lots of exercise. Do you like to go for long walks or a daily jog? Do you have another large dog of the opposite sex with whom your Giant can roughhouse? In the past have you enjoyed playing energetically with your dog? You'll be happier, and so will your dog, if you choose a breed that fits into your present lifestyle, rather than expect to change your way of life because you've acquired a dog.

Also on the subject of exercise: Don't plan to shove your Giant out of the door and let him exercise himself by running around the town or countryside. No dog should be allowed to run loose and unsupervised, but this is especially true of large dogs, who are intimidating to some people, who are very efficient at tearing trash bags apart, and who can damage livestock and wildlife. For your dog's safety and your neighbor's peace of mind, fence your yard before you bring your puppy home.

Giant Schnauzers need regular grooming, so plan to put some time aside for this. They don't shed in great tufts, but this doesn't mean that hairs don't loosen and if loosened, dead hairs stay in the coat too long and impede the growth of healthy hard new coat. The Giants you see at shows and in photographs didn't come that way: a lot of time went into grooming and preparing them. Visually, the area most affected by grooming is the dog's head. If you don't keep your dog's head trimmed and neat, his beautifully expressive face will disappear under a mass of hair. Grooming the whole dog is important for the health of his skin, for removing burrs, and for keeping him clean. Grooming isn't an extra. Whether you do it yourself or pay someone else, regular grooming is essential to your dog's health and to your enjoyment of your dog.

A surprising number of people say they're interested in Giants because some member of the family (usually a child) is "allergic to dog hair", but they've been told that "Schnauzers and Poodles don't shed, so there's no problem". Such breed promotion to the contrary, the idea that Giants never shed and therefore are non-allergenic is an unfortunate myth, without medical or scientific basis. While regular stripping and plucking can reduce to a minimum hair shed by the well-groomed Giant on clothes and furniture, an experienced breeder-owner gives a more forthright picture: "If Giants don't shed, where do all those little heaps of black hair come from that accumulate in the unswept corners of my house?" A check with an allergist confirms that the usual "allergic to dogs" reaction is not breed-specific. So if there's an allergy problem and your kid sneezed and broke out in hives until you got rid of your gundog or German Shepherd, don't look to the Giant Schnauzer as some kind of miraculous exception.

The Giant Schnauzer is a working dog. The working dog group includes some of the most intelligent breeds of dog. If you have never owned a Giant before, you'll be amazed at how quickly he learns, and at the number of things you can teach him. But this great intelligence carries an obligation with it. A Giant won't be happy left alone in a pen or in your house all day. A working dog enjoys life most when he is given responsibility and a job to do, whether the job is herding, obedience, baby-sitting, guide-dog, or rescue work. The Giant Schnauzer is a dog who must be trained and worked with regularly. He demands your attention and thrives on it, and will reward you many times over for the time you spent training him. But once again, look at your lifestyle. Most obedience instructors recommend that you work with your dog for an hour a day. Though this amount of time can be shortened once your dog is trained, no intelligent dog should be left in "cold

storage" only to be worked when the owner's conscience gets the better of him. Working with your dog doesn't necessarily mean formal obedience work. He should know basic obedience; and once you get hooked on obedience, you'll probably want to go all the way, in competition. However, teaching him tricks and games, letting him help you by carrying things or finding something for you - these activities let him use his mind, and give him a feeling of being important to you. Is your schedule loaded with job, social commitments, clubwork, or other hobbies? Leave room for time with your Giant.

Don't buy a Giant Schnauzer because of pictures you've seen of them, or what you've read about them. Don't even base your decision on what devotees of the breed tell you about them. Meet the dogs. Watch them at shows, but more important, see them at home. Take your time. Get to know the breed. It's the only way to find out if a Giant Schnauzer is the right dog for you