

Toys

In our culture, the meaning of the word toys changes, as we grow older. Children imagine far different items than adults when we speak of toys. The tee shirt that reads "He who has the most toys wins," reflects the stereotypical view of middle-aged men surrounded by a mass of equipment (often golf related) purchased basically for play. When you talk to a dog fancier, the word toys takes on a whole new meaning and we're not talking about tennis balls either.

Toys is the name given to one of the seven groups recognized by the AKC and is comprised of over twenty different small breed dogs from various historical backgrounds. Toys are most often bred as companion dogs. Some of the more popular Toy breeds are the Toy Poodle, the Chihuahua, the Yorkshire Terrier and the Pug. As of late, I have seen a bit of local popularity appear with Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Maltese, Shih Tzu, Chinese Crested's and the Havanese. I have always felt there is a little something special when looking into the eyes of one of the small brachiocephalic (short muzzled) breeds because their eyes seem to project a gentle soul. Brachiocephalic breeds in this group include the Affenpinscher, the Brussels Griffon, the Cavalier King Charles Spaniel, the English Toy Spaniel, the Japanese Chin, the Pekingese, the Pug and the Shih Tzu. While the Pomeranian is not short muzzled, it too has the wonderful ability through expression to communicate its' insightful character. The Pom looks like a tiny Spitz sled dog and where it lacks great size, it does have a strong compact body, great energy and what appears to be a love of life itself.

Not all small dogs can be considered a Toy. Occasionally, breeds of any group are born smaller than their standard and are sometimes called runts. Personally, I dislike this term and feel we should simply refer to the standard and sterilize any individuals that may not perpetuate the breed criteria instead of insulting anyone with a belittling term. Basically, I'm stating there is no such thing as a miniature German Shepherd Dog, but there are a few Toy breeds that have similar physical characteristics to larger breeds such as the Miniature Pinscher who resembles the Doberman and German Pinschers, the Toy Manchester Terrier who looks like a tiny Manchester Terrier found in the Terrier group, the Italian Greyhound which is similar in type to the Whippet and Greyhound, and the all time popular Poodle that comes in a toy size which is the smaller than the miniature and standard sizes.

The Silky & Yorkshire Terriers are two toy breeds often confused for one another as they share a black saddle back and have a reddish tan head and legs, but the Silky is more compact in the body than the Yorkie and has a real terrier attitude making him truly capable of hunting small animals while the Yorkshire is more of a lap dog. On the topic of working Toy breeds, I remember reading about several Papillions earning tracking titles in American Kennel Club obedience trials. There is a strong likelihood any of the Toy breeds can be trained to perform tasks believed suited for only large breed dogs. Although it would make little sense to protection train a Miniature Pinscher, you can bet

those guys can, and will, alarm bark when someone shows up on their turf. The point here is these little dogs are easy to obedience train.

However, some small breed dogs are notoriously difficult at times to housebreak. I used to believe it had something to do with the size of the dog's bladder equating to more frequent urination. In reality, a dog produces .5 to 1.0 ml of urine per pound per hour, therefore with everything being relative; the small bladder logic just doesn't hold water. My next best guess as to why it may be difficult to housebreak a Toy breed is that many of these little dogs rarely put their feet on the floor. Small dogs seem to find their way onto the furniture or in the arms of their owners resulting in their paws touching the floor infrequently. Just as crate training helps teach the dog the consequence of soiling its living space, the opposite is also true. If a dog can relieve itself on the floor and jump up onto the furniture, there is no negative consequence to the dog for eliminating on the floor. Dogs keep their crates clean because they recognize the area as living space. If a dog doesn't use the floor as living space then it becomes fair game for elimination. Also, I find many Toy breed owners tend to carry their pooches to the outdoor location and then place the dog on the ground to relieve itself. My experience shows that dogs that do not walk the entire walk to the correct outdoor location behave as if they have no idea how to get there by themselves. People experience a similar feeling when we have been driven to a location by a friend or family member and then need to ask for directions when asked to meet them at the same location at a later date because although we have been there before, we were not paying strict attention to the directions when someone else was doing the driving. The same holds true for dogs: they need to "drive" themselves as to be clear on the directions to the spot. I am not saying these adorable small breeds can't be housebroken but it may take a little longer in some cases and perhaps keeping them on the floor until they are good at it may make it easier for them to understand the concept. Also, the use of a leash as a control tool might also make it easier to help them "walk the walk" to your preferred outdoors bathroom area. Barking, although a normal behavior in dogs of all breeds, is sometimes a problem when an owner can't get a handle on quieting their dog. A few members of the Toy group have a watchdog mentality and can bark endlessly. I have a friend that works for The Center For Animal Care And Control in NYC and have been told that the NYC shelter system often finds themselves with "little white dogs" due to their tireless barking at neighbors coming off the elevator on their floor of an apartment complex.

Personally, I have always enjoyed the majority of Toy breeds and found many of them to be wonderful family companions. When raised with children, toy dogs frequently become the child's best friend and are treasured forever. Due to their size, it is important not to allow children to roughhouse with fragile members of the Toy group, as fractures are common with tiny dogs. Medically, knee problems and dental disease seem to be issues with some members of the group, while others suffer from cardiac related ailments. Despite any predispositions to medical conditions, the fact remains that small dogs generally live longer than large breeds.

A dog trainer friend of mine recently said small dogs take up more space than large dogs due to their tireless energy. Many of the "busy" small breeds are actually in the Terrier and Nonsporting groups but a Toy can get busy and appears to be gigantic at times.

As always, when in the market for a family dog one must do the necessary research to determine which individual breed might be best suited for the family. Once a breed has been decided on, the next task is finding the individual dog based on his or her behavioral traits to assure that magical bond. Good luck in your quest.