

SO YOU THINK YOU WANT A CORGI?

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We regularly get people asking if a Corgi is the right dog for them, so I'm hoping this can help people see what it's like to live with Corgis. I have focused on the issues that might be problematic for some people or situations, with the most focus on those issues about which new Corgi owners (and some experienced ones) frequently ask advice.

So you think you want a Corgi.

Who can resist a Corgi? With that foxy face, stubby legs, and bunny butt they are cute as can be. Pick up a book on dog breeds, or visit a breed-selector web site, and you will find that Corgis are smart, easy-to-train, and have an easy-care, dirt-repelling coat. They are loyal to their people, can live peacefully with other animals, are good watch dogs and don't require acres of running room. Toss in a convenient size and the fact that they can be happy in most climates, and they sound like the perfect dog.

But no dog is right for everyone. The question is, is the Corgi the right dog for you?

Corgis have several breed traits that can cause problems for many homes. Here are some of the Corgi traits that all future owners should be aware of:

BARKING:

Almost all dogs bark. Corgis bark a lot. If you have never lived with dogs that bark a lot, you may want to spend some time in the home of someone with a barking breed to see if you can live with it.

It's true that many Corgis make excellent watchdogs. As herding and farm dogs, one of their historic jobs was to notice anything "different" and alert the owners. This means your Corgi is likely to bark if someone walks up your sidewalk or if a stray cat starts digging up your flowerbeds.

Your Corgi may also alert you if your neighbor left a gate open, if a car is parked on the opposite side of the street from its usual spot, or if the wind is rattling your gutter. He may bark to warn you that someone is entering your neighbor's house. He might be best friends with the Labrador up the street, but that won't stop him from barking to warn you that the Labrador is walking past your house.

While you may be able to train your Corgi to stop barking on command, you may never stop him from giving the initial warning. His job is to let you know something is different, and your job is to see if the thing that's different is threatening.

Corgis also tend to bark when playing. As cattle- and geese-drovers, they moved their stock by nipping at their legs and barking. Because of this history, many Corgis bark when things move, or to get things to move. So they may bark at a thrown tennis ball, bark to get you to throw the Frisbee, or bark whenever other dogs run. This type of motion-activated barking can be difficult to control and almost impossible to eliminate.

Finally, many Corgis are "talkers" who use a wide range of vocalizations to express any number of opinions or to get your attention. Corgi vocalizations may include low woofs, whines, grumbles, short howls, and a series of whining grunts that many Corgi owners refer to affectionately as "Wookie" or "Chewbacca" noises.

NIPPING:

Nipping falls into two categories. The first is nipping at legs. This comes from the herding background of a Corgi. The behavior is easy to stop in puppies (if you want to participate in herding with your Corgi, please consult a herding trainer before training this out of your Corgi pup, since you can eliminate the herding tendency completely if you handle this the wrong way.) If a Corgi has reached adulthood with the nipping behavior still present, it can be harder to stop, but it can be done. Before you get a Corgi puppy, you should be prepared to deal with this behavior appropriately.

The other type of nipping is puppy play-biting. Just about all puppies must be taught that it's not ok to bite people in play; dogs bite each other in play and this behavior is normal. The difference is that compared to most gun dogs and some other soft-mouthed breeds, many Corgi puppies bite *hard*. This type of biting is easy enough to stop if you are diligent and consistent, but in some

puppies the behavior can take weeks or more to eliminate. If you have frail people in your home, people who are afraid of dogs, or small children who you won't be able to keep away from the puppy during the training process, a Corgi puppy may not be for you. An adult or older puppy may be a better choice.

CORGI COATS:

That weather-resistant double coat comes with a price. Corgis shed a lot. I mean a lot. Most dogs shed, but double coated breeds blow coat once or twice a year, and the Corgi undercoat is very dense. You may see a tiny eighth-inch clump of dead hair sticking out of your Corgi and give it a tug only to find yourself holding a two-inch chunk in your hand as the loosed undercoat expands. When your Corgi is shedding, you will find wafting balls of hair in corners and under furniture. In addition, light shedding can be expected year-round. A fuminator bursh is very helpful with Corgi coats.

The other issue is that the Corgi coat is truly amazing at repelling dirt. We get regular compliments on how well groomed our dogs are, yet the fact is that except when they are blowing coat I only brush them once a week for perhaps three minutes each. Their colored bits gleam and their white parts are spotless. They can run through the mud and within ten minutes there is hardly a spot on them, and what is left can easily be brushed off. They only need a bath if they roll in something that smells.

What is the downside to this? The downside is the Corgi coat picks up dirt in one place (outside) and deposits it somewhere else (on your floor). You will bring your Corgi in from a walk, and she will lie on the floor, and ten minutes later when she gets up there will be a fine sifting of grit on the ground that came off her belly.

Corgis' short legs are a problem here too. Corgi bellies always get wet. In the summer they get wet from dew. In the spring and fall it's from rain, and in the winter from snow.

If having a towel hanging near the door all year is something that doesn't appeal to you.

ENERGY LEVEL:

Energy level varies widely between individual Corgis. All will need regular walks and some playtime and training to be happy. Many Corgis need much more than that. Some are almost impossible to tire out, and young Corgis (under 2) may never stop moving. One of mine can go for a two-hour off-leash hike, take

a thirty-minute power nap, and start dropping tennis balls at my feet to play. Corgis like this need to learn some sort of “settle” or “enough” command or you won’t have any peace, and quite a few Corgis need a job (agility, herding, competition-level obedience) to be happy. Their bossiness (see below) and tendency to bark (see above) can make a Corgi with unspent energy very difficult to live with.

NEED TO BE WITH YOU:

Corgis in general are not prone to separation anxiety when you are out of the home (any dog can develop this, but some breeds are more prone than others). However, when you are home your Corgi will want to be with you. Most Corgis don’t like being left in a yard alone. They will follow you around the house, helping you cook, do laundry, and even take a shower if you let them.

They also don’t like if their people are scattered through the house. Most Corgis want everyone to be in one place at one time and may act anxious or unhappy if someone is upstairs and someone else is downstairs. This behavior is common to many herding breeds and its intensity varies from individual to individual.

INTELLIGENCE:

Many people who say they like smart dogs have never owned one! Having a Corgi means making sure you always stay one step ahead of her. Most Corgis learn new behaviors easily, which means it won’t be hard to teach her to sit, stay, and come when called. It also means she’ll learn that you can’t catch her if she’s not on a leash and runs the other way. She’ll remember that you stashed her favorite tug toy in the laundry room. She won’t forget that the last time you made chicken you gave her a piece and she’ll start drooling every time you make chicken. She may make associations you do not want her to make and learn in which situations you make her listen and in which ones you don’t follow through.

BOSSINESS:

Bossiness is not the same thing as dominance. Cows and geese are stubborn and can be aggressive, and a Corgi that backed down when confronted was a dog that could not do its job. Even submissive, people-pleasing Corgis can sometimes be bossy. Corgis may talk back, exhibit “selective hearing,” bark to demand treats or play, or shove you with a nose or paw to get you to move in a

certain direction or pet them on command. Corgis do not tolerate manhandling, but they do require owners who are consistent and don't give in to all their demands. Even a submissive Corgi can become a pushy, domineering brat if you don't show him that you are a calm, effective leader who does not let the dog make all the decisions. Those of us who love Corgis find them endearing and the bossiness amusing, but some common Corgi bossy behaviors include planting feet on walks and refusing to move if you choose a different direction than the Corgi wanted to travel; barking incessantly to demand play-time; and pawing/nudging for belly rubs.

Remember that hard-wired breed behaviors are difficult or impossible to eliminate and physical attributes can't be changed, so if you get a Corgi you should be comfortable living with these things for the life of the dog. Corgis were bred to be independent problem-solvers who could work for hours. It is unfair to own a Corgi and not provide her a healthy outlet for that type of energy.

If you read this and thought "How funny! That's just what I'm looking for!" then welcome to the large club of Corgi-lovers!