

# THE MAREMMA SHEEPDOG



## Do Maremmas make suitable pets?

Yes, providing they are given exercise AND are socialized. They can either be great companions and pets, guardians of your stock, or, as in my case, both. If you choose a Maremma for the right reasons, celebrating rather than trying to change its natural character and qualities, you will have a loyal friend and will never want to be without one.

## Where do Maremmas come from?

The Maremma sheepdog is a rare working breed originally bred in Italy as a livestock guarding dog, and for centuries guarded large flocks of sheep on the plains and in the mountains of Italy. It lived day and night with its flock, to take responsibility for keeping the flock safe from 4-legged predators, primarily the wolf, and from 2-legged thieves. When the shepherd left the sheep the dogs were never encouraged to follow their master but rather to be loyal to the sheep. Maremmas continue to have a very strong instinct to guard whatever left in their charge, whether family or flock.

## What do Maremmas look like?

Maremmas are beautiful, medium to large dogs, strongly built, with a majestic bearing. They are gentle but courageous and have an intelligent expression. The breed has an abundant double coat – a thick undercoat that is shed once or twice a year (or more often when living indoors) – and a longer top coat. This provides exceptional protection against the weather and is almost self-cleaning – mud will drop out of the coat when dry, rarely needing bathing. However the breed does need regular grooming to keep the coat free of mats and tangles. It is always white: a little shading of lemon or ivory is acceptable. In size, the males range from 65 cm to 72.5 cm and can weigh between 45 to 55 kilos. Maremma bitches range from 59cm to 67 cm and weigh between 35 to 45 kilos. The average life span is between 10-12 years, though some dogs reach 15 and beyond.

## What sort of character is a Maremma likely to have?

Maremmas are loyal, loving and intelligent animals with tremendous character and a sense of humour. But they can also be stubborn and need to be trained with firmness and respect. As a companion, the breed retains the same instincts and qualities that make it such a successful flock guard: intelligence, courage, independence, loyalty to its own, and suspicion of strangers. But although the breed is aloof and protective, it is also sensible and tolerant, never aggressive or nervous. Because of this independent character it is extremely important to train a puppy to your requirements before it is six months of age, such as walking on the lead, travelling in the car, and basic obedience.

## How should I train and socialize my Maremma?

As with all dogs, the key to training your Maremma puppy is to have firm expectations and kind handling. I recommend that you take your puppy to your local domestic obedience training class. All dogs, not just Maremmas, benefit from basic training, which will make your Maremma a nicer and more biddable companion for having had socialization with other people and dogs and training of basic commands. Training includes house training, learning to be left alone for short times without being destructive, traveling in the car, being brushed, playing games and being socially acceptable with people and situations and all of this can be achieved with basic obedience training commands.

Training really starts as soon as you arrive home with a puppy. Do not allow your puppy to do things you don't want him to do when he is older and bigger. If you don't want your adult dog to jump up, sit on the sofa, chew your fingers, or bark for no reason don't let your puppy do those things either. Help him learn the correct behaviours by using a firm 'no' to discourage unwanted behaviour, and plenty of praise when he gets it right. He will not do undying obedience as Borders and German Shepherds but his slow responses should be excused as it's not likely to be bad behaviour. Maremmas bark to alert to callers etc, but barking should not be encouraged for any reason.

## How are Maremmas with children?

In general Maremmas are very good with children especially those within their own family. With socialization they should respond well to other children especially the family's children's playmates. Formal introduction is best and more importantly with puppies as they do not understand what strangers are.

Maremmas will not knowingly hurt a child. Children should be discouraged from disturbing a puppy when sleeping or resting, and your puppy should have a kennel, basket, mat or special place where he knows he will be left in peace. Children should never be left alone with large dogs especially when young.

### **How are Maremmas with visitors?**

We find that our Maremmas are delighted to welcome visitors, but it is good practice to introduce Maremmas to visitors and strangers in the home. Formal introduction to your Maremma with the visitor seated is by far the best way and allow the Maremma to investigate rather than people being pushy.

### **How are Maremmas with other animals?**

Being natural guardians, Maremmas live peaceably with stock or pets and accept other domestic animals as part of the household. They like company, especially human company, but will happily accept the company of a cat, other dog, etc. Maremmas do not have the hunt instinct but will chase birds or other animals off the premises.

## **GENERAL CARE**

**Exercise.** Maremmas need regular exercise, including free running, and can do well both indoors and outdoors, as long as they have shelter, company (human or animal) and proper care. If exercised well, they will tend to be quiet in the house, though they will be alert to the arrival of visitors. Maremma puppies should not be over exercised or encouraged to jump as they grow very fast and strenuous exercise can harm their developing bones and muscles. As youngsters it is better that they get their exercise around your garden or property. If there are other dogs in the household playing with them also forms part of daily exercise. As adolescents and adults Maremmas are capable of long walks.



**Grooming.** All dogs benefit from regular grooming and the Maremma is no exception. The crucial time for grooming is when they are moulting. For males this happens on average once a year. Bitches will moult either two or so months before coming into season or two months thereafter.

**Feeding.** As puppies, Maremmas can eat up to 1.4 kg of food a day, split into three meals. Once adult or mature this can drop to about 1 kg at around the age of two years, depending on the development and size of the Maremma. Diets vary, and breeders have their own preferences and will advise accordingly.

**Health.** Maremmas are generally healthy animals with no breed specific illness recorded. There has been known within the breed, some epilepsy, heart problems in late life, cancer and very few have had true hip dysplasia. Your Maremma should have routine vaccinations from your vet and regular treatment for fleas, ticks and worms. You will also need to consult your vet about spaying or neutering your pet from 6 months old.



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