

## SO YOU THINK THAT YOU WANT TO GET A HUSKY OR A MALAMUTE?

By Margit Maxwell March 27, 2015

If you have thoughts leaning towards the possibility of finally buying that Husky or Malamute that you have always wanted to own, before you run out to buy your dog, ask yourself two very important questions:

Why do I really want to own this breed of dog?

AND,

What do I really know about what it takes to look after this breed of dog?

How Much Is That Doggy In The Window?

The sad reality is that Huskies and Malamutes are most often bought solely based on their beautiful looks and as a result, these dogs are also one of the most likely dogs to be owner surrendered at Animal Shelters. Just take a walk through any Human Society facility and the sheer number of huskies, malamutes, and their cross breeds waiting to be adopted are staggering. Why are so many of these dogs ending up dumped by their owners?

Ignorance Is No Excuse

The main reason for the existence of this problem is due to owner ignorance. People rush out to buy these dogs because they are in love with the IDEA of owning a Husky BEFORE ever taking the time to investigate what it takes to keep these dogs happy and healthy. And then when the reality of actual Husky ownership sets in, the unprepared and disillusioned Husky owner, instead of stepping up to his assumed responsibilities, surrenders the now adolescent Husky or Malamute to let it become someone else's problem. There are some unforeseen circumstances that occur in people's lives (death, chronic illness, a change in marital status) that can result with a Husky or Malamute

needing to be rehomed but the irresponsibility of owner ignorance as the main cause of owner surrender of a dog is inexcusable and absolutely preventable.

The sobering reality for surrendered dogs is that while there are some dogs that are fortunate enough to get new homes, many dogs, especially dogs that have significant behavioral issues, are not likely candidates for adoption. Many of these problem dogs will most likely end up being euthanized. Every potential dog owner should be extremely mindful of this fact BEFORE a dog purchase is made.

### Time For A Reality Check

So in hopes of preventing any more owner surrenders of Huskies and Malamutes to animal shelters, here is some important information that you MUST know and understand about Husky and Malamute ownership so that you can make a good informed choice about whether or not this dog breed fits well into your life, your family, and lifestyle.

This information is not meant to dissuade you from Husky or Malamute ownership. These breeds are wonderful dogs in the capable hands of a suitable owner. The right owner happily and willingly meets all the needs of their northern breed dog and as a result they tend to have very few problems related to owning these dogs. But when these dogs end up with the wrong owners or in the wrong environment, these wonderful dogs are forced to become a dog that is LESS THAN their wonderful full potential.

Huskies and Malamutes that are under exercised, unmotivated, socialized, or devoid of human companionship and bonding can quickly turn from being your dream dog into the dog of your nightmares. Through no fault of the dog, destruction of personal property, constantly escaping from the yard, reactivity to people and other dogs, no leash control, and even fear aggression are all a reality for the owner that either cannot, or does not, meet the physical and emotional needs of these dogs.

Okay, so what do you need to know and understand about Huskies and Malamutes before making the commitment to own one?

## HUSKY AND MALAMUTE 101

### It's A Working Dog

Whenever you choose to share your home with a working breed of dog, you must be prepared to satisfy this dog's hard wired drive to do the job that it was created to do. Huskies and Malamutes are a dog breed that was designed to pull sleds and run long distances. If these dogs are not allowed to have a daily physical outlet for their abundant energy and they are not given any mental stimulation to address the working dog side of them, they will take and channel that frustrated energy of being limited and begin a reign of physical destruction the likes of which you have imagined.

### Property Destruction

Left indoors, bored and exercised dogs can destroy furniture, walls, doors, and pretty much anything that they can sink their teeth into. Put them outside to save the inside of your house and they turn your backyard into a lunar landscape complete with craters, rip up any existing shrubs, trees, and flowers, and destroy fences in an effort to escape from the yard. If you don't provide them with a thrilling daily adventure they will resort to going out into the world and searching for their own adventures. Because there may need to be alterations and modifications made to house and yard to accommodate owning this dog breed, people living in rental housing may not be in a position to be able to freely make the necessary adjustments to safely house this breed of dog.

Additionally, due recent breed profiling, some rental properties will no longer allow you to have a Husky or a Malamute and some insurance companies may even refuse you coverage if you own a dog breed that is currently listed on the BSL lists.

Check your city or town ordinances regarding Husky and Malamutes ownership and taking your dog out into public places. Some places may require that these dogs be muzzled when they are out in public. These are things that you need to find out about BEFORE you get this breed of dog.

### Breed Specific Exercise Needs

If you are a couch potato, if you dislike a lot of physical exercise, if you lead a busy personal life, if you work at a job that keeps you away from home for long hours daily, if mobility is an issue for you, or if you have your hands full looking after small children all day long, this may not be the best breed of dog for you to get for your lifestyle. These dogs require rigorous DAILY physical activity. They won't care if it is freezing cold outside, if you are sick, had to work overtime, had a hot date lined up, or if you had a long day filled with child care duties. These dogs will demand that they be walked or run until they are sufficiently tired regardless of the other things that went on in your day. You may even need to pay a dog walker to help you out with this task. If this sounds unappealing to you, then this is not the dog breed for you.

### Howling

Oh and don't forget about the howling. Bored and lonely Huskies and Malamutes are very likely to sing the Husky and Malamute Blues. This is not likely to make you very popular with your neighbours or your landlord.

### High Prey Drive And Reactiveness

These dogs have a naturally high prey drive and a reactivity which means it is in their nature to want to chase anything that runs or moves quickly. This not good news if you already share your home with other small dogs, cats, or even small children. While these dogs, with the proper training, supervision, and adequate socialization, and breed appropriate daily exercise, might be able to get along very well with other family members ( two legged and four legged), there are no guarantees that this

will be the case for your specific dog. If you already have a small dog, cat, or child, think very carefully before getting a Husky or Malamute. There are no guarantees that the dog you get will be able to live peacefully with other family members.

## The Single Minded Nature Of The Husky or Malamute

While these dogs are a working breed of dog, the work that these dogs do does not require them to constantly check in with the owner looking for their input and instructions. Other than a lead dog needing to be able to listen and obey verbal commands given by the musher, the rest of the dogs are pretty much just focused on running and following the lead dog. No complicated instructions for the dogs to follow in this case.

This differs enormously from how Sporting Dogs or Search and Rescue Dogs breeds think and work. The dog breeds used to do these other jobs are genetically hard wired to work closely with their handlers. They are bred to work symbiotically and cooperatively as part of a team with humans. This also means that these other dog breeds are much easier to obedience train because they are naturally compliant.

Huskies and Malamutes, while being very intelligent, are also legendary for being notoriously hard to motivate and at times, mule-like and stubborn, making them a challenge to obedience train. For the most part they hate the tedious repetition of obedience training and before they will comply with a given cue, they will first analyze and evaluate if it is in their best interest to comply with the request.

Quite often, the Law of Competing Motivators will come into play and the owner quickly finds himself on the losing end of the bargaining deal. Many owners have found themselves watching the south end of a north bound Husky or Malamute as they merrily go off to find something much more fun to do than off leash recall, heel, or sit. And since Huskies and Malamutes are bred to pull, be prepared that teaching these dogs NOT to pull while they are walking on leash can be unbelievably frustrating.

If you frustrate easily, if you are a naturally impatient person, if you dream of having the perfect off-leash dog companion trotting faithfully at your side, this likely is NOT the dog breed for you.

### High Need For Early Socialization

In order to create a social dog that you can easily take to the dog park or for a walk, this breed of dog requires early, appropriate, and constant socialization to try and offset their naturally reactive nature. Huskies and Malamutes, left to their own devices, like to approach people and other dogs at top speed and with as few of their feet on the ground as possible. This means that as an owner of this breed you must plan to dedicate an absurd amount of time just to be able to successfully walk this dog down the street without being yanked, dragged, or becoming air borne. If this sounds like tedium to you or if you know that you do not have the free time to be able to put into this kind of project, this might not be the dog breed for you.

### The Demand For Attention and Human Companionship

While these dogs may look rugged and tough on the outside, under all that fur resides a tender heart and a gentle fragile soul. These dogs LOVE to be with people and will suffer tremendously if they are ignored and excluded from everyday family life. Far too often these dogs are bought or adopted, not trained, not socialized, and then relegated to live outdoors, just surviving and existing rather than living a full rich life as an active part of the family. Living a solitary life at the end of a chain without love, human companionship, and family involvement will be like a prison sentence for these people-loving personable dogs. If you do not have the time, the attention, or the devotion to dedicate to these sensitive natured dogs, then pass on owning a Husky or Malamute.

## Seasonal Coat Shed

And in case you did not already know, these double coated dogs will shed their entire undercoat yearly and then they will have another secondary minor shed as they grow their seasonal undercoat back in. Imagine living in a snow globe but instead of snow, there is dog hair wafting through the air with every breeze that blows through your house. That is the reality of living with a double coated northern breed dog. If you are fussy about the way your house is kept, if dog fur on your clothing or floating in your soup is repulsive to you, then you best pass on owning this breed of dog because there WILL be dog hair. Lots of it. Embrace the concept or opt to get a different breed of dog.

## Give Them An Inch And They Will Take A Mile

Because of the gregarious natural personality of the Husky and Malamute, that means they also require an owner who can evenly match them in attitude, drive, tenacity. Quite often people who are very soft spoken, naturally timid, fearful, or shut down kind of people end up having problems trying to handle the larger-than life Husky and Malamute personality.

If you have problems with follow through, if you have problems being consistent in how you approach things, or if prefer to live your life as more of free spirit then you might just have problems with handling this breed of dog. Unless you are willing to bring your A Game every day, these opportunistic dogs will spot the weakness and capitalize on it. If you don't really have an A Game in your personal inventory or you really don't like these kind of character challenges then maybe this is not the best breed of dog for you to own.

## These Dogs Sound Like A Lot Of Work

Yes, along with owning a Husky or Malamute comes lots of work. But, for those astute people who did their homework and knew exactly what they were signing up for none of what I mentioned will seem like a chore or

drudgery because these dogs are COMPATIBLE with them and their lifestyle. For well informed and well prepared owners, all the issues that come with Husky and Malamute ownership just add to the endearing nature of these dogs.

With the right owners and with the right training Huskies and Malamutes:

- \*Make wonderful canine companions who love to be with their humans;
- \*Are always ready to go on an adventure at a moment's notice;
- \*Love to be active. They are like a furry gym membership that you cannot ignore;
- \*Love to be included as part of the family;
- \*When trained and supervised, do well with children of all ages;
- \*Are intelligent dogs and their clever antics will keep you smiling and laughing;
- \*And are usually world class snugglers, cuddlers, and love bugs.

Be Honest

As long as you are willing to be brutally honest with yourself about whether or not you have what it takes to sustainably handle this high energy, high drive breed of dog then you probably will not run into too many problems. If however, your personality is not a good match or you do not have the right kind of lifestyle to easily accommodate this breed of dog, then you can save yourself a lot of problems by NOT getting a Husky or Malamute. But most importantly, by being willing to be honest about who you REALLY are, you could be saving a Husky or Malamute from the awful fate of being bought only to be later rehomed.