



CHOOSING A BRITTANY

provided by Jessica Carlson

WHAT A BRITTANY NEEDS

Brittanys are not for everyone. They can make excellent family dogs and excel in many areas, but they require training and daily attention, and most do not make good "kennel" or outdoor dogs. This breed is still bred to hunt and many of their behaviors and traits are attributed to that breeding. Brittany people love those very qualities, but it is essential that you be well informed before deciding on this breed.

One of the advantages of a Brittany is that it is not a high-maintenance dog in terms of coat care and upkeep. Coat maintenance is easy, because the medium-length coat needs no clipping if your dog is strictly a pet. It will need a good brushing with a slicker brush once or twice a week to get out dead hair (especially at the start of fall and spring), and to make sure the dog is free of parasites such as fleas or ticks. Don't forget nail clippers! Long nails are not only unattractive and ruin a dog's feet, but the longer they get the more danger there is of one being torn off. For the pet, bathe only when the dog is very dirty and a good thorough brushing won't do the job. You can use any basic dog shampoo for this. Visit BrittanyGrooming.com for more detailed grooming instructions.

Like all dogs, Brittanys need socialization, training, good food, and regular veterinary care including routine checkups and vaccinations. Most Brittanys love food, and must not be allowed to get fat (average weight is 30-45 lbs.). They need a few good toys, especially if left alone for long periods of time. We prefer a couple of "real" bones (bought in a pet store), an occasional compressed rawhide or cow hoof, and a ball, stuffed, or squeaky toy for when you're ready to play, too! We highly recommend crate training for all dogs. Crate training will make housebreaking infinitely simpler, and being crate trained means your dog will always have a safe way to travel in the car. And if your dog ever needs to spend the night at the vet, it will be less traumatic if he has learned that a crate is a safe haven. Brittanys usually use an Intermediate size crate (about 23" high). We recommend using a plastic crate rather than wire, which does not offer the safety or the feeling of security for your dog.

Obedience training is recommended for all dogs. Brittanys are very adaptable and can easily learn the rules of a new house and family, but a good obedience class is an excellent place to establish ground rules and form a bond of understanding between you and your dog.

It is a misconception that all Brittanys are high-strung and need many miles of exercise every day. If you meet enough Brittanys from different backgrounds, you'll find that Brittanys are not a breed for generalizations. They range from mellow to extremely active, big to small, and soft tempered to very stubborn. Most Brittanys are bred to go all day when they're outdoors, but also to be great companions.

Brittanys do require attention every day, though. They are very much people-oriented dogs and often don't do well when they don't get as much attention as any other member of the family. Ignore your Brittany, and s/he may soon get your attention with his barking, digging, or destructiveness!

Brittanys usually live 12-14 years, so be prepared to make that kind of commitment. This is an active breed that will require plenty of daily attention for many years.

"FIELD" VS "SHOW" BREEDING

Brittanys are above all "dual" quality dogs – both field AND show. While some breeders choose to focus primarily on one aspect, there are more [Dual Champion](#) Brittanys than all other Sporting breeds combined (this means the dogs have achieved a Championship title in both shows and field trials). Be wary of breeders boasting "champion lines" who point to dogs several generations back in the pedigree; **parents and grandparents are the most influential on the puppy's potential.**

If your primary interest is a hunting dog, it would be best to find a breeder who seeks to demonstrate their dogs' abilities in field and show, and who seeks other strong lines to better their own. Look for parents and grandparents with titles in AKC field trials (FC, AFC, DC), hunt tests (JH, SH, MH), or NSTRA (shoot-to-retrieve) events.

If you want to complete towards field or show titles, find a reputable breeder who competes with his or her dogs in those areas. Your local [Brittany Club](#) can usually recommend responsible breeders in your area who may have dogs or puppies available.

If you're looking for a family pet, a rescue dog is a wonderful possibility. Hundreds of wonderful, healthy, purebred Brittanys are in need of new homes each year. Some are "owner-assisted" placements when owners can no longer keep their pets; others are fostered by experienced Brittany owners while they are evaluated, trained, or otherwise prepared for adoption. Rescue volunteers will usually have a good idea of what type of home the Brittany needs and will do well in. While rescue organizations do not guarantee that rescue

Britts will want or be able to hunt, some have had excellent success! Brittanys typically have no trouble bonding to a new owner or family; I typically say they love whoever feeds them!

If you decide to get a dog from a breeder, don't be shy in asking questions to learn about the parents and other relatives of the litter. Ask about health, temperament, why the parents were chosen as a match, and what guarantees the breeder offers on their pups.

Beware of "backyard breeders" who have not thought beyond breeding their personal pet or hunting dog, who do not have health clearances on the puppies' parents, and do not offer any written guarantee or support. Be sure the puppy's parents (and preferably grandparents also) are clear of genetic defects such as hip dysplasia and epilepsy. Ask for OFA or PennHIP certifications to indicate the dogs are clear of hip dysplasia, CERF (now OFA) clearances to indicate healthy eyes, and ask whether any relatives are known to have had or produced seizures. It is important to choose a breeder who will be open with you on these matters, and who obtains genetic clearances/certifications consistently on all of their breeding stock.

MALE VS. FEMALE

People often have a personal preference to the sex of their pet, but Brittanys are not a breed for generalizations. Characteristics such as loyalty, affection, and ease of training are typically not gender specific in this breed. While most people think female dogs tend to be sweeter, calmer, and make the best companions, many male Brittanys (especially if neutered) fit this description to a "T"!

Characteristics vary from dog to dog, not within sexes. If you are getting a dog strictly for a companion, you should plan on having it spayed or neutered around a year of age. This will eliminate many undesirable hormonal influences, such as possible roaming in the male or false pregnancies in the female, and will help prevent some possible health problems as your dog ages. Early spay/neuter is not recommended before a year of age.

PUPPY, YOUNGSTER OR ADULT

While no one can deny that puppies are cute, at the same time who wouldn't mind missing the chewing and housebreaking stages? I strongly recommend considering an older dog for first-time Brittany families. Since Brittanys can vary greatly in their energy level and personality, an older dog is best to make sure you get one that fits your home and lifestyle. If you have small children, cats or other smaller pets, it may also be best to find an older dog who has shown itself to be suited to those. Brittanys are very adaptable, and can easily learn the rules of a new house and family at any age!

Consider adopting a rescued Brittany from [American Brittany Rescue](#) or [NBRAN](#). There are hundreds of Brittanys of all backgrounds, descriptions, and ages available across the country each year. Breeders also sometimes have dogs of various ages available to hunting and/or companion homes, so if you prefer to find one from a known background and breeder, try contacting the [Brittany Club](#) in your area for recommendations.

COMPETITION

If you are interested in the many activities in which Brittanys are able to compete, be sure to discuss this with the breeder or home of the dog you plan to get, and/or talk to other people involved in that aspect of competition. There are many people in our breed who are willing to help newcomers get started. The most common activities Brittanys often compete in are:

- Field Trials (for the finished field dog or promising youngster)
- Dog Shows (to find the dog that is structurally closest to the written Breed Standard)
- Hunting Tests (for hunting companions of all levels of ability)
- Obedience Trials (for the obedience trained dog)
- Agility Trials (for dogs trained to go over, under, and through obstacles on a course)
- Junior Showmanship (for kids 9-18 with any breed dog - show handling is judged, not the dog)

Visit an event in your area, where many breeders/participants will be able to help you get started with your Brittany in any of these areas. Again, these are "Dual Dogs" and many fanciers compete in various activities with their Britts. See [BrittanyBreed.info](#) for more information on the above endeavors, and visit the [AKC Events](#) page to search for upcoming events in your area.

IN REVIEW

Brittanys can make excellent companions and excel in many areas, but they require training, and plenty of personal attention. Their medium size, wash-and-wear coat, and happy, intelligent temperament make them an ideal dog for many families. Brittanys are bred to be hunting dogs and most have a mild to strong hunting instinct. While they can be happy without hunting, Brittanys do best with attention and activities to challenge the mind and body. Most get along very well with other dogs, and enjoy pretty much any activity their owners do!

Do not get any dog on impulse. If you are serious about getting a Brittany, you should be willing "shop around" and/or wait for the right one for your home and situation. These are long-lived dogs and you should only get one with the intention of caring for its entire lifetime. Puppies are cute, but all puppies grow up, and it's up to you as to whether yours becomes a lovable and well-behaved companion, or an unruly nuisance. The more time you put into your dog's socialization and training, the more it will give back to you.