

The Alaskan Malamute is a very attractive breed and often finds itself in unsuitable homes with owners who have no understanding of the origins, instincts and needs of the breed. In some cases owners simply find they do not have the time or room for a Malamute, or perhaps are moving or have suffered a marriage breakup. Whatever the reason, there is a constant need to find new homes for Malamutes.

Before you Adopt an Alaskan Malamute

Adopting a dog in need can be a very rewarding situation and provide a happy outcome for an unwanted Alaskan Malamute, but it is a decision that must not be made without a great deal of consideration, research and objectivity. If you are not going to be able to provide the dog with a caring and suitable long-term home please don't let your emotions get the better of you.

When considering adopting a dog you need to put as much thought into the breed of dog you are considering as you would if choosing a puppy. Is this breed going to suit your lifestyle, and are you going to be able to cope with the breed's instincts and needs?

If you are considering adopting an Alaskan Malamute here are a few things you need to consider:

What to expect from the Alaskan Malamute

The Alaskan Malamute is an arctic sledding dog with a very strong hunting instinct. This breed has relied on these strong instincts for its survival over thousands of years in the harsh environment of Alaska, so in most cases these behaviours and traits cannot be fully overcome with training.

Be aware that the Alaskan Malamute is quite likely to:

- dig up your lawn and garden
- not be friendly towards other pets
- require very good fencing and strong gates
- be difficult to train
- pull on lead
- run away if let off lead, doesn't come when called
- be too strong for children or the elderly to walk
- hunt other animals
- not be friendly to other dogs, particularly those of the same sex
- require a lot of exercise, obedience training and mental stimulus
- do just about anything for food
- shed massive amounts of hair at certain times of year
- not require much washing but will need a lot of brushing
- not be a good guard dog
- not bark, but occasionally howl
- require an owner that understands the breed and is firm but fair.

Of course each dog is different - not all Malamutes will display all of the above behaviours and there can always be the odd exception to the rule. However, if you are not prepared to have a dog that does any of the above, then the Alaskan Malamute might not be the breed for you.

Things you need to consider:

- Are you going to be able to provide a permanent home for the Malamute?
- Are you financially able to support a large dog? Take into account feeding, worming, registering, vet bills etc.
- Do you have time to exercise a Malamute every day?
- Are you fit enough to cope with a large, strong dog and will you be able to walk it?
- Are you confident with large dogs? The Malamute needs a firm owner they can respect.
- If you have another dog, are the two going to get along?

Choosing a Malamute to adopt

One of the advantages of getting an older dog is that you can see the "end product" and can get a good idea of the dog's health, temperament and behaviour, which is not always apparent or developed in a young puppy.

It is important that you determine the reason that the dog is requiring a new home and, if there has been a problem such as howling or escaping, if you are going to be able to cope with or overcome that problem.

Please bear in mind that a dog will not necessarily display those same behaviours when in a new home. If the situation changes, it is possible that the behaviour of the dog may change as well. Also bear in mind that many Malamutes are not needing new homes because of behavioural problems, it may simply be that the owners are moving, have had a marriage break-up or simply have decided they don't have the lifestyle or time for the Malamute.

For instance, if a dog has been escaping, abnormally destructive in the garden or howling because it's been left alone all day and is bored, going to a home where it gets more activity and attention may change this behaviour. Sometimes going to a new home where there is the companionship of another dog may alter these behaviours, providing of course that the two get along.

Likewise, if the Malamute has been in a happy home where lots of time and attention has been spent on him or her, or if he or she has always lived with another dog, taking it to a home where it will be on its own and / or receive little attention may not work out.

There are some behaviours that will almost certainly change with a new owner, depending on the level of authority the new owner exhibits and how much the Malamute respects them. In many cases where dogs are needing a new home simply because the owner doesn't understand the dog and hasn't provided the necessary authority and discipline (by this we don't mean physical abuse), a previously "naughty" dog can change its behaviour completely if the new owner is seen by the dog as someone to be respected.

If you already have a dog or other pets

Dogs

Be aware that Malamutes are not always friendly towards other dogs, and in many cases do not get along with dogs of the same sex. If you already have a dog, we recommend you get a Malamute of the opposite sex as this is much more likely to result in long-term harmony and companionship between the two.

Introduce your existing dog to the Malamute on a "neutral" territory, such as in a park or out on the nature-strip, and always under good control on lead. If the two dogs exhibit friendly body language allow them to play on lead. If at this stage the dogs give signs that they are not going to get along, this is unlikely to improve when in your backyard on your existing dog's "territory".

Malamutes prioritise food very highly as a result of its arctic heritage, so be cautious at feeding time. The Malamute will initially need to be separated from your other dog at feeding times, perhaps by tying both dogs up away from the other dog's food bowl or feeding in separate areas. Once all food bowls are taken away allow the dogs back together.

Be similarly cautious when giving bones or even toys until you know your Malamute and can better predict his or her reactions. It may be that the need to confine your dogs at dinner time or when giving bones will be ongoing, however in some cases this may not be necessary. As the old saying goes, "better to be safe than sorry". There is nothing worse than a dogfight and expensive vet bills when they could easily have been avoided by a bit of extra caution.

Make sure you give your existing dog as much or even more attention and reassurance than the newcomer – you want to avoid your dog's nose from being put out of joint. Ill feeling towards the newcomer and even fights can be caused by a decrease in attention to the existing dog and the owner's failure to acknowledge the correct pack order.

Cats

Unless the Malamute has been brought up with a cat they are quite likely to see the family puss as something to be hunted, so it may be wise to confine your cat to the house and Malamute to the yard until you have a better indication of how the Malamute will react. Even if the Malamute has lived with a cat before, it may not view your own cat with the same friendliness so be cautious and introduce the two only when your Malamute is under effective control. Malamutes and cats do co-exist quite happily in many cases, and most often do when the Malamute is brought up with the cat. Again, it is better to be safe than sorry so be sensible and cautious when introducing cats and Malamutes.

Caged Animals

If you have caged animals such as guinea pigs, rabbits, birds, chooks etc. think carefully before getting a Malamute. If you do get a Malamute make sure the cages are in a confined area away from the Malamute, preferably separated by a strong fence as well as by the cage. Although Malamutes may co-exist with caged animals for quite some time, many an owner has come home one day to find that the Malamute has taken a sudden interest in their caged pets with some very unpleasant results!

Other Livestock

Malamutes are basically a hunting dog and cannot be fully trusted around livestock. Once the livestock start running often the Malamute's hunting instinct kicks in and they will take up the chase and in most cases cannot be controlled by voice commands. Never let a Malamute off lead around livestock for the protection of both - Malamutes most often don't have the same instincts as the herding breeds and can get kicked by larger livestock, and may attempt to hunt smaller or newborn livestock.

If the Malamute is going to be living in an area with livestock around, make sure gates are always kept shut and that your fences are dog-proof and in excellent condition.

Bringing your adopted Malamute home

Being introduced to a new home is always a stressful time for a dog, so be prepared for your new Malamute to be a little unsettled at first and be patient and understanding.

Make sure you get the contact details of the previous owner and keep them on hand in case you need to contact them.

Warn the Neighbours

It is always advisable and courteous if you warn your neighbours beforehand that you are getting a new dog and that he or she may take a bit of time to settle into the new home. Explaining the background of the dog and that you have "rescued" it will often help your neighbours be more tolerant and understanding if they hear a bit of howling or crying during the night. If your neighbours like dogs, introduce them to your new Malamute - this might also help appease any concerns they may have about the huge "wolf-like" dog that has moved in next door.

Remember, once neighbours have been upset by a noisy dog, the damage is done and is harder to overcome – the slightest noise from your Malamute can then become a big issue between you and your neighbours.

Helping your new Malamute settle in

Use common sense and think about what you can do to help your Malamute settle in before you pick him or her up from the previous owner.

Get as much information as you can from the previous owner about health care (vaccinations, worming etc), diet, accommodation (kennels, sleeping arrangements, etc.), where they got the dog from, pedigree papers (if available) the activities the dog enjoys and so on. If possible take a favourite toy, dog bed or blanket from the old home so the dog has something familiar at the new home.

Always ask the previous owner about the diet of the dog and try to replicate that diet initially. If necessary, wean the dog onto a different diet gradually by replacing some of the previous food with a new food in increasing proportions. Don't suddenly introduce a vastly different diet as an upset stomach will add a further obstacle to the settling in process.

If the Malamute has come from a happy home, try to replicate the environment and routine of the previous home as much as possible to start off with. Malamutes usually like to be outdoors but as close to you and the house as possible so they can still hear what's going on inside. A Malamute that has been indoors regularly in its previous home may be stressed by being outdoors at the new home and vice versa. A Malamute that has had a kennel / sleeping quarters by the back door is probably not going to like being kennelled down the back of the yard or in a shed at night.

Often a small change can make a big difference to how well your Malamute adjusts to the new home. If your new Malamute is not coping well with a particular aspect of its new environment, try something different. If you need help with solving a problem please feel free to phone us.

Further Information

Contact the Alaskan Malamute Club, Victoria Inc. for a free Alaskan Malamute Information Pack or view online at www.users.bigpond.com/amcv/.

If you would like to speak with someone about the Alaskan Malamute or about adopting a dog please phone Sandy or Ralph on (03) 9714 8540, or contact us by email to amcv@bigpond.com.