

### Curly-Coated Retrievers



#### TIPS FOR NEWCOMERS

**G**uest columnist Kathy Phillips is active in training Curly-Coated Retrievers for field, obedience, and conformation. She acquired her first Curly in the 1970s. The following observations were learned in her many years of Curly ownership.

1. The Curly is not only the "prototype" of a versatile retriever; it has never been impacted in type,

working style, or temperament by the American field-trial system. *So toss out your assumptions about retrievers, and learn to think "Curly."*

2. Curlies do not make good kennel dogs. They do best in close contact and active involvement with their owners and family, developing a unique relationship with each member of the household and thriving with children who are taught how to behave around dogs. Given adequate exercise, they quickly learn to "settle" in the house. Vigilant puppy-proofing and crate training are worth the effort.

3. Never waste an opportunity to enhance a Curly puppy's desire to please. This is the foundation for cooperation and thus trainability. You can't increase your dog's intelligence, but you *can* influence trainability with consistent, affectionate praise for his efforts to please. Simple games can increase those opportunities.

4. Obedience training not only instills "good manners" and basic control, it also teaches you how to communicate effectively with your dog and teaches him how to learn.

This is a perfect way to enhance his desire to please. Start early.

5. Never underestimate a Curly's intelligence or love of "mental games." If you think pup may have put one over on you, he probably did, and has likely been doing so for a while. The breed standard describes these dogs as *wickedly smart* for a very good reason. They are! A sense of humor is mandatory, but you also need to learn when to gently, firmly draw the line so that pup learns you deserve his trust and respect. Curlies are precocious—they do not wait to learn until *you* decide it's time to train. Most bad habits are the result of "inadvertent training"—training that occurs when the dog's brain is in gear, but yours isn't. Learn to think like him—and ahead of him—to avoid inadvertent training. There's a reason most honest Curly trainers admit their first Curly taught them more than they taught the dog.

6. Always keep training fun. If he's not having fun, he'll find a way to *make* it fun. Creative avoidance of drudgery or unfair correction becomes a habit that complicates training in countless ways. Keep it short, varied, and suitable to his age and readiness. Pushing a Curly to do advanced work before he's ready is just another version of inadvertent training.

7. Family life is the foundation of socialization. Puppy kindergarten and obedience classes are an excellent addition to that. But these are by no means adequate for a Curly. The more varied and positive his experiences throughout the first year and beyond, the more well-rounded and confident he will be. Socialization has a direct impact on adaptability. This is vitally important for show, field, and performance dogs—but also to prepare your Curly for the most demanding job a dog is ever given—being a good family pet.

I wish you loads of luck and tons of fun in all your Curly endeavors! —K.P.

Thank you, Kathy, for your most perceptive observation of our breed. Ann Shinkle, P.O. Box 350790, Grand Island, FL 32735; [annshinkle@aol.com](mailto:annshinkle@aol.com) ✦