

Ready to Make Your Pup a Swimming Pro?

Explore the best ways to get your furry friend ready for the pool. From choosing the right life jackets to practicing supervised play, ensure your dog's safe and fun swimming experience all summer long.

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you have both a dog and a pool, depending on several factors, your canine companion may be able to join you while you're keeping cool this summer
- Since pools are both delightful and potentially dangerous, you should consider how easy it is for your dog to get into and out of your pool, and whether your pool is accessible to your dog when you're not at home or unavailable; it's important to always supervise your pet around any pool
- Some people mistakenly believe all dogs are natural swimmers, however, there are breeds who for various reasons are not and for whom swimming is either dangerous or impossible
- Getting your dog used to the water should start as a slow, gradual process; most dogs require at least a little coaxing and reassurance before they get comfortable and become good swimmers

There's a whole lot of summer going on across the globe, and people everywhere are finding swimming pools to cool off in as temperatures soar. Since canine family members are often included in warm weather activities, it's natural for pet parents to wonder if their dogs can also enjoy time in the pool. The answer is yes, depending on the dog and the owner's ability to help their pet spend time in the water safely.

Many dogs are born with a love of the water and are natural swimmers, while others require a little swim training. And then there are dogs who show no interest at all in getting wet. Regardless of where your pet falls on the water-loving spectrum, here are some things to think about, according to PetMD:¹

- Is your pool easy and safe for your dog to get in and out of? Are the stairs easy to access?
- Do you have a fence around the pool to prevent access when you're not home or available? This is especially important if you use a solar cover on your pool.
- Have you invested in a life jacket for your dog?
- Are all human members of your household aware that your dog must always be supervised when she's in or around the pool, and should never be left unattended?

Is Your Dog a Natural Swimmer?

Some people mistakenly believe all dogs have a "swimming gene" and are born with the natural ability to swim. But the reality is that while most dogs instinctively make a paddling motion if they happen to wind up in water, it's often the extent of their ability to swim. Not every dog paddle is effective at keeping the animal afloat, and many dogs have no idea how to move toward the steps or the side of the pool.

Medium-to-large sized dogs with water-resistant coats and webbing between their toes are typically strong swimmers. They've been bred for water work and include most retrievers, including the lab, the golden, and the Chesapeake Bay retriever.

Dogs with "water" in their breed names are a given. These include the Portuguese Water Dog, the Spanish Water Dog, the Irish Water Spaniel, and the American Water Spaniel.

Newfoundlands, despite their giant size, are also great swimmers. Other breeds comfortable in the water include English and Irish setters, the standard poodle, and the Schipperke.

Dogs that aren't designed for swimming include "top heavy" breeds — those with large chests and small hindquarters. Short-muzzled dogs, including the **brachycephalic breeds**, and dogs with very short legs also don't do well in water. For example, bulldogs, dachshunds and boxers are generally not able to stay afloat. Brachy breeds like the pug tend to tire easily due to the abnormal structure of their respiratory organs.

Many small dogs can be very good swimmers, but because they get chilled easily and tend to be frightened in the water, they don't always do so well.

Getting Your Dog Comfortable in Water

Go slow in the beginning. Always use a PFD (personal flotation device, lifejacket or life preserver). The goal is to discover whether your dog enjoys the water and whether he has the build and aptitude for swimming. Even if your pet is a recognized swimmer like a retriever, you should never simply drop a dog who has never been in water into the pool.

Some natural swimmers need no coaxing to go in, but other dogs bred for swimming need to get used to the water gradually. The first time you take your dog to the pool, if she's hesitant on the deck, try getting in yourself and encourage her to follow you. If she does, give her plenty of praise.

Get her used to the feel of the water in the shallow end, then gradually work her into deeper water. If she's moving around well and seems comfortable, you can throw a floating toy or ball or even a stick out for her to fetch. If she swims out to the object and retrieves it, call her and encourage her to swim back to you. Praise her liberally when she reaches you.

If your dog is a natural in the water, it won't be long before she's diving in on her own.

An alternative to going into the water yourself is to try bringing your pet around a group of swimming dogs. Some dogs easily get the hang of being in water in the presence of other dogs swimming around them.

If your dog isn't a breed recognized for being good in the water, you can try introducing him very gradually, but stay right with him and start out with your pet in a flotation vest or lifejacket. If he seems comfortable and can move around well, he'll probably enjoy swimming. If he's mostly scared, shivering and looking like he'd rather be anywhere else, he may need more time to get used to the water — or he may never enjoy it.

If you have a breed that isn't physically built for swimming, it's best to keep him on dry land. The water is dangerous for dogs who can't stay afloat or tire out before they can swim to safety. If you do bring your non-swimmer out to your pool, put him in his lifejacket or flotation vest until you're confident he can swim without risk.

Remember: Safety First!

Even Olympic swimmers tire out, so don't be overconfident that your dog can handle anything in the water. Even the best canine swimmer can get very tired, especially in deep water. Older dogs and puppies tire more easily than adult dogs, and special care must be taken not to let them overdo it.

Even if your dog isn't built for the water or just doesn't like it, he can still hang out at the pool with you as long as you take some precautions.

Make sure he's in a lifejacket or flotation vest just in case, has plenty of cool, clean water to drink, access to shade, and can walk around without burning his paw pads. If he starts to heat up, fill a container with water and gently pour it over him, starting at the back of the neck and working toward the tail. Then have him roll onto his back and drench his belly in cool water as well. Whether your dog is on land or on the water, be alert for signs of **heatstroke**.

Sources and References

¹ [PetMD, June 11, 2024](#)
