



## **Everything You Ever Wanted to Know (and some things you never thought to ask) About Tibetan Mastiffs**

I am so glad you are trying to learn about TMs before adding one to your household. The first thing I can say is that for large dogs, they are very long lived, so you are looking at a 10-15 yr commitment. Most people buy a puppy based on looks: Color, coat length, "cuteness", etc., but with a TM, the most important thing to consider is temperament, and that is not something you can see in a photo, so the best advice I can ever give someone is to go visit your breeder and meet their dogs. Temperament is highly genetic, research has confirmed this, and you need to know the temperament of the parents before you buy a puppy. Temperament is literally going to make or break whether a placement is successful or not. There are some lines that are known for being ultra guardy, to the point that they won't let anyone they don't know into the home or on the property. Literally, no one. While you may be thinking, oh great, I need a good guard dog, that thinking fails when you want to have family or friends over for dinner or your child wants to have friends over to play, or you want to go on holiday and you can't leave your dog. But that is not true of all TMs, so don't panic. There are also lines that are super sweet, people friendly, and love to go anywhere with you and meet anyone. I have owned 18 TMs over 28 years, and have fostered over 50 for Tibetan Mastiff Rescue, so have had somewhere close to 70 TMs come through my home. All of mine have been people friendly, and for the most part dog and cat friendly, except one. But that one was hell to live with. We had to lock her in a room in the basement when anyone came over, a room with no windows, because she would have literally gone through a window to attack a stranger. She passed away about 10 years ago, and as much as I loved her, I can tell you truthfully that it lifted a burden off my shoulders when she passed. There were 5 pups in her litter, and 3 of the others were exactly like her in temperament. One was returned to the breeder and is still with her; another was originally owned by a long time breeder and even she could not handle him, so he was neutered and sent him to live with a retired breeder who lived out in the country and had lots of property that was heavily fenced. All of the TMs that I have now are super friendly, and will jump all over you and lick your face once they have been introduced. I have grandkids and they love kids. But, they come from lines that have been bred for easy going temperaments for 40 years. They were raised or trained no differently than the one that had such a harsh temperament. This is how I become totally convinced of the role that genetics play in temperament, before I ever ran across research studies that confirmed it. Please do not take my comments on temperament lightly. Take the time and spend the money to visit your breeder and know what you are buying.

As for training and recall, TMs are exceptionally smart. They will learn anything you want to teach them in a matter of minutes. But they also learn how to open doors, refrigerator doors, cabinets, drawers, gates, etc., by watching a couple of times, so you need to prepare for that. Instead of Child-proofing your home, you need to TM-proof your home. Look around your home and think, if I were a TM and I was looking for trouble, where would I find it? And then take steps to prevent it. You have to out think them and be one step ahead. They will learn obedience commands, and I highly recommend teaching them, but once learned, they will respond when it is to their benefit, not when you want them to. They have 100% recall. Until they don't. They know exactly what you want of them, and most of the time, they will accommodate your request, but they weigh every situation and make their own decisions as to whether they need to comply or not. These are dogs that have been bred for thousands of years to think for themselves, and they do. It is instinct, and no amount of training will train their instincts out of them. Just like a herding dog will nip and herd, or a retriever will point and retrieve, a

guard dog will guard, and TMs are the ultimate guard dogs. And they take their job seriously. You will be amazed at how quickly they go from happy-go-lucky to full on guard mode: I have seen it happen within a split second when they see, hear, or sense a threat. You need to get really good at reading your dog and understanding the most subtle clues so you can recognize when they are about to go full blown TM on you. And all that being said, I do not let any of my TMs walk off-leash. I have had 2 senior females that I could let walk off leash on my property when they got much older, but I would not recommend it unless you know your dog very, very well. Some people do it, and you might be able to, but my point is, don't expect it and don't depend on it. If you have a TM with reliable recall, just be thankful for it.

I have only had 1 TM with separation anxiety, and he was a rescue whose owner committed suicide, we think in front of him. Understandable response from the dog. It took us a long time, but he eventually got over it completely, as long as he had another dog with him. But it took almost 2 years before he stopped panicking during thunderstorms and such. I still would not leave him alone, without another person or dog companion. He was happy as part of our pack and we were glad he learned to feel safe again, but it did take a LOT of time and patience. I think in general, TMs do much, much better and are less anxious and less destructive if they have another dog in the household. I know of some breeders who won't sell a TM to a home unless there is a second dog. And truthfully, they need another large dog who can run and play as rough as they do. I think puppies do much better with an adult dog in the household, too. They learn very quickly from an older dog and are truly "pack animals". Their people can be their pack, but another dog makes life for them, and for you, much, much easier.

Grooming depends a lot on whether your TM is long or short coat. They all have massive winter undercoats, but some more so than others, and the long-haired coats are hard to maintain. The coat becomes longer, thicker, and softer when spayed or neutered, and more difficult to manage. Your best bet is to invest in the right tools and equipment. I highly recommend a high velocity, 2 motor dryer like the Air Force Master Blaster. It is expensive, but worth every penny. It will save you. Also the right assortment of combs and brushes and undercoat rakes. Get the right tools to do the job and save your hands and back.

Feeding time is often a source of angst for TM owners. These dogs have a very low metabolism, eat way less than you would expect for their size, and most are not food motivated. If they aren't hungry, they won't eat. Sometimes for days. If they are stressed, they won't eat. If they are hot, they won't eat. If they don't feel safe, they won't eat. If a girl is in season, they won't eat, neither the girls nor the boys. If they have a high value food, like a meaty bone, they won't eat; they will guard it until they are sure no one is going to take it away. If all is right with the world, they will eat, but they eat when necessary, and what is necessary. You are going to stress more about their eating than they are. If you try to free feed and leave food out all the time, it creates two problems: They snack but don't eat enough to gain or maintain a normal weight because they never get hungry, and it sets up the potential for resource guarding. I have found that they eat better when fed once a day because it allows them to get hungry. They do best when fed separately from other dogs to eliminate the worry of competition for their food source. Once they eat, remove their bowl and it removes their need to guard it. In summer, they need less. We feed a mixture of dry kibble and raw. Mixing in the raw made a huge difference in their appetites. They will eat raw even at times when they will completely refuse kibble, such as when sick, following surgery (spay or neuter for example) or in heat, or pregnant and nursing. Raw green tripe is a lifesaver, literally, and everyone should keep some in the freezer for those emergency situations where nothing else seems palatable to them. It is high in protein, a great source of pre- and probiotics, and has a perfect mineral balance (example: calcium:phosphorus ratio). Use common sense as to how much to feed. Feed the dog in front of you instead of following standard recommendations for how much or how often: If they are

underweight, feed more; if they are overweight, feed less. If they are growing pups, feed more. If they are working dogs, feed more. If your girl is pregnant or nursing, feed more. If they are couch potatoes, feed less. As they get older, feed less. If they are spayed or neutered, feed less. If they aren't eating something, try something else. Your dog is not refusing to eat because he is stubborn. He is refusing to eat either because he doesn't need food at the moment or because what you are offering is not appetizing to him. Find something that is.

TMs bark to ward off predators, not just \*at\* predators. It is part of how they do their job, so it is inherent in their nature. Some more than others. More so at night. My yard is completely quiet during the day. You would never know there is a dog here. But as soon as the sun goes down, they wake up and start to bark, because nighttime is when most predators roam and prowl. They are saying, hey, there are TMs here, don't even think about messing with us!!! We live out in the country, and yet, we still don't allow our dogs to bark needlessly. When it gets dark, we bring them inside or go out and patrol with them if they won't settle down to assure them that we are aware and have the situation under control. Somebody has to be in control of the situation; if it isn't you, then it will be them. I intervene to stop incessant barking because I don't want them to bark continuously. It bothers me even if there are no close neighbors, and it is not a habit I want to reinforce. You can decide whether it is something you can tolerate or not, but count on it happening, and if you have neighbors, plan now how you are going to prevent it from becoming a problem. Inside, they are fine, they lie down and are quiet unless there is something serious going on outside that can't be ignored. I tell people that when inside, they make great shaggy throw rugs.

Probably more than you ever wanted to know about TMs, lol, but I hope it helps. If you do decide you want a TM, consider a local breeder, not necessarily in your town, but at least in your country who speaks your language, someone who you can visit and who can mentor you and help you if you need it. I think the biggest mistake anyone can make is buying a TM puppy sight unseen over the internet from people they don't know and have never visited. If you need help finding a good breeder, let me know.

Debbie Mayer  
Noble Legacy Tibetan Mastiffs  
2024