

LEARNING MADE EASY



2nd Edition

Golden Retrievers

for
dummies[®]
A Wiley Brand



Learn the characteristics
of the breed

What you need to know about
grooming, illnesses, and disease

Potty training, obedience,
nutrition, and more

Nona Kilgore Bauer

*Author of Dog Heroes of September 11:
A Tribute to America's Search and
Rescue Dogs*



Golden Retrievers

2nd Edition

by Nona Kilgore Bauer

for
dummies
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Golden Retrievers For Dummies®

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Introduction

Whether you're thinking about making a run for the gold or you already own one or a dozen Golden Retrievers, you've come to the right book. Through these pages, I explore all the elements of your Golden Retriever's life (present and future company included), from the joyous days of puppyhood to the sweet serenity of the senior years.

Before you turn to the next page, I must warn you in advance. I will occasionally nag a bit. That's because certain dog facts and rules are important enough to bear extra emphasis, and I will lose sleep if you don't understand them. If you notice it, I'm proud of you, because it means that you remember what I said.

How to Use This Book

This book is intended for busy 21st-century dog owners who don't have time to sit down and read through 300 pages at a crack. This is a reference you can jump in and out of as dog questions rear their furry heads. Just flip to the Table of Contents or the index to find the pertinent pages on that topic.

That's not to say you *shouldn't* read this entire book! Every chapter offers important nuggets of information that I believe every Golden owner needs to know. But you don't need the details on senior dog food if your Golden's just a pup, so that's the real beauty of the For Dummies formula. You can go directly to the information you need at the time.

In case you're wondering about those little gray boxes you see throughout the book, these sidebars contain

bonus information — kind of like puppy treats. These goodies are not essential to the overall content of each chapter, so don't feel guilty if you skip past one or two!

Foolish Assumptions

I made a few assumptions when I wrote this book:

- » You are hooked on Golden Retrievers and either own one or you're thinking about taking the plunge.
- » You want to find out the best way to raise and train your Golden, as a loving family dog and well-behaved canine citizen.
- » You want your Golden to not just survive, but thrive, and you bought this book to help you make that happen.

Icons Used in This Book

Throughout this book, various icons appear in the margin to highlight different types of information.



TIP These icons help you discover ways to make your life (and your dog's life) easier.



WARNING The Warning icon means just that!



REMEMBER Remember icons are memory boosters so that you won't forget important doggie details.



JUST FOR
FUN

This icon marks pure canine pleasantries that dog folks like to know.

Where to Go from Here

Where you start in this book depends on what you want at any particular moment. If your Golden just dug into the trash for the umpteenth time and you're counting to ten, then check out [Part 2](#). Other needs and questions will point you to other sections of the book. It's all just the flip of a page away. So go ahead, indulge yourself and explore everything this book has to offer!

My goal in writing this book was to make you the smartest Golden owner in your neighborhood — heck, even the entire town! If I succeed, everyone will be richer for it — you, your Golden, and, of course, I'll sleep a whole lot better, too.

Part 1
Finding Your Soul Mate

IN THIS PART ...

Golden Retrievers are great dogs. But they also shed, chew, and need lots of exercise. Are you ready for that?

In this part you learn the importance of becoming a Golden Retriever expert and researching this special breed before you decide to add one to your family.

Find out how and where to look for a healthy Golden who will be compatible with your family. (Skip the Internet and newspaper. Good breeders don't advertise!)

Learn how to choose the pup who's right for you. Hunting buddy? Family camping companion? Snuggle bunny? Your breeder can help you decide which puppy fits your Golden dreams.

Chapter 1

Are You Meant for Each Other?

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Getting acquainted with your Golden Retriever
 - » Admiring the well-rounded Golden: personality, brains, beauty, and ability
 - » Understanding why Goldens aren't for everyone
 - » Adding up the Golden price tag
-

If you live in a typical neighborhood, then you're probably neighbors with at least one Golden Retriever. Goldens seem to be everywhere — down the block, on television, and in every magazine. These big, beautiful furries are the most popular advertising gimmick of the 21st century. Not only are they huggable, they're trainable as well. What other dog can leap so high or smile so wide into that camera lens? As one of the five most popular dog breeds of the American Kennel Club (AKC), Goldens are no doubt one of the most photographed subjects in the media. Of course, Golden fanatics don't see anything strange about this, and love every doggie moment. Heck, even nondog people will admit (under their breath) that those Golden Retrievers are kinda cute.

This chapter gives you the inside scoop on this special breed. If you haven't fallen in love with your neighbor's Golden already, you will by the time you're done browsing this book.

But — and this is a big *but* — although Golden Retrievers are great dogs, they're not for everyone. This chapter also tells you how to determine whether you're one of those lucky people who is perfect for the breed.

The Name Game

The Golden Retriever is aptly named — especially the “golden” part. What began as a description of this dog's yellow coat more appropriately describes his sunny disposition and his 14-karat value to his owner and to society. Golden Retrievers are great family dogs and all-around good sports who think they were created purely to please their person. This happy, funny, friendly fetcher of anything not nailed down has captured a permanent corner of the American heart, home, and marketplace. Give them a spot with a human on it (as you can see in [Figure 1-1](#), this Golden will gladly join you on the couch!), a puddle to play in, and a stick or tennis ball to fetch and carry (maybe not in that order), and you've made their day. As a bonus, throw in an occasional duck or pheasant — after all, retriever is 50 percent of this dog's name!



© Getty Images.

FIGURE 1-1: There is no better place to lounge than with a Golden at your side!

ARE ALL GOLDEN RETRIEVERS GOLDEN?

The color of that lush Golden Retriever coat dates back to the breed's four original yellow ancestors crossed with a few selected hunting breeds sprinkled here and there during the late 19th century. Today, the breed color can range from very pale blond to reddish gold to deep Irish Setter red.

Keep in mind that the color of the Golden's coat has nothing to do with his intelligence or equally golden temperament. Color matters occasionally in the conformation ring. Some show judges seem to prefer a blonde or lighter coat, which only means they probably spent too much time watching reruns of old Marilyn Monroe movies.

More than Beauty

The Golden Retriever's personality is as golden as his outer coat. This dog was bred to please, and please he

does. He started out as a hunting partner who delivered birds to hand, and has evolved into modern times delivering whatever suits his owner's fancy. He's always happy to oblige.

Because they were originally bred to work in tandem with humans, Golden Retrievers are also highly trainable and eager to please. These dogs are a breath of fresh air in an era of too many wild and crazy dogs who sometimes drive their owners nuts.



WARNING

Trainable doesn't mean that Golden Retrievers are born already trained. It just means they're very willing fellows who like to work as a team, and if you're the captain of the team, your Golden will be delighted to do your bidding. Remember the part about the captain; it's important! (See [Chapter 7](#) for more on training.)

FORGIVE AND FORGET

Golden Retrievers have the dog world's most forgiving disposition and will blithely dismiss all those dumb mistakes you're bound to make. Whether you come home 2 hours late, forget his dinner bowl, or accidentally step on his tail, he'll forget it ever happened once you smile at him. (A hefty scratch behind his ears, and he's your slave forever.) That does not imply that you have his permission to do stupid things. It just means he understands you're only human.

Likewise, you should follow his good example and forgive your dog his trespasses. In dog terms, they're not mistakes because he's just a dog and is the product of his instincts and your training, good or bad.

The Do-It-All Golden Retriever

If the Golden Retriever were a human, you'd be envious. Not only are Goldens beautiful, intelligent, and friendly, they're also natural athletes who have dipped their paws into every canine sporting discipline. These dogs are joyful companions who are willing to try anything as long as they can enjoy it with someone fun to be with.

Beyond sportsmanship, that famous Golden nose has nudged its way into almost every other facet of the human-animal connection. Today, Golden Retrievers serve as assistance dogs for the physically disabled, guide dogs for the blind, and hearing dogs for the deaf. And that Golden nose keeps on sniffing, working for law enforcement as drug and arson detectives, and as search and rescue dogs who find victims buried under snow and earthquake rubble. Beyond that, with their sweet demeanors, they also excel as therapy dogs in hospitals and nursing homes where, unlike the average hourly employee, they love their jobs. And they work for free, unless you count dog biscuits as a paycheck.

Why Not a Golden Retriever?

Of course, you want a Golden Retriever. What person in his right mind wouldn't? And you firmly believe you and the dog would be a golden combination. Right?

Well, maybe. Despite their high-profile status in the media, Goldens aren't for everyone. This is a sporting breed, folks. These high-energy dogs require training. On

the other hand, Goldens are easily trained and love to learn, so training could and should be a fun but very busy experience.

With no offense intended to my favorite breed, the following sections outline some reasons that you may want to think twice about life with a Golden Retriever.

Hair, hair, everywhere

The Golden Retriever has what's called a *double coat*, which means that he has a soft downy undercoat to insulate him from the cold and heat and a longer outer coat of guard hairs. These hairy critters shed their downy undercoat in huge quantities every spring and leave a little dog hair all over the house all year long. The resulting clouds of dog down all over the house can make you tear out your hair as well.

DO YOU REALLY WANT A PUPPY?

Golden Retriever puppy fever isn't a dog disease; it's a people condition that most often occurs in spring when some humans become infected with an uncontrollable urge to add a puppy to the family. It can lead to dog heaven or, heaven forbid, a nervous breakdown if the affected person thinks all Goldens are like the ones they see on television. The cure — getting that cute puppy immediately — can be worse than the disease.

If you're serious about getting a Golden puppy (or *any* puppy) and not just caving in to the kids or some other wild and crazy impulse, follow the advice of responsible dog owners and breeders. Look deep into your dog-loving soul and check out the big picture. Love alone is not enough. This is a commitment that hopefully will last 12 or more years!



TIP

Brushing will help keep that nuisance dog hair to a minimum. Daily brushing is best — twice weekly is a must. If you use a professional groomer, expect to pay \$50 to \$75 per grooming session. Pretty is

seldom cheap. (For more on grooming, see [Chapter 13.](#))

Move over!

If you want to live with a Golden Retriever, make sure you have room for one. These big sprawling fellows easily occupy at least one couch cushion or easy chair. Everything's big, including their muddy paw prints on your kitchen floor and their nose prints on the window. That happy Golden tail can easily clear your coffee table. (Sorry, move your Waterford.)



REMEMBER In short, Goldens need space, and lots of it, both in-house and out. A yard is a must, and good fencing is the best way to keep him safe and out of trouble. (Yes, given the opportunity, he will try to wander off in search of squirrels, bunnies, and other varmints.)

BORN TO RETRIEVE

The Golden Retriever is a Scotsman, a hunting dog born and bred in Scotland over 150 years ago. To the Golden's credit, he has surpassed Scottish tweeds and kilts in popularity, and today performs well beyond the duck blind he was born for. Overdosed with talent and versatility, the 21st-century Golden consistently outperforms other breeds in almost every discipline in dog sports, including more mundane activities like sock and shoe theft. (Just ask my personal Golden Retriever crew about that!)

Daily dose of exercise

A normal Golden usually creates a little happy chaos, which is part of his universal appeal. These spirited dogs have an inbred desire to retrieve, play, chase, and chew. They need daily exercise to expend all that sporting energy, or they will entertain themselves in the usual canine fashion. (Think destruction!)

A typical Golden Retriever household usually has a few ragged chew marks on the chair legs, dog toys strewn about the living room, piles of shredded sticks in the backyard, and one or two large sticks at the front or back door, the ones he delivered to you as his special prize.



REMEMBER Your Golden will not exercise without you. *You* are his incentive to romp and play. Daily walks and jogs (a favorite Golden activity, as shown in [Figure 1-2](#)), Frisbee games, and bumper chasing (those large, hot-dog-shaped canvas or plastic retrieving objects sold in pet stores for retrieve-a-holic dogs) can help keep your Golden tired and content. For more on exercising with your dog, see [Chapters 10](#) and [17](#).



© Getty Images.

FIGURE 1-2: A good run is great for *both* of you!

LIVELY OR LAID BACK?

Just like people, you can't stereotype Golden Retrievers. If you're discouraged about all this talk about active, high-energy Golden Retrievers, don't worry. You can still find a quiet(er) Golden companion who won't totally disrupt your household. Some lines (or families) of show-type Golden Retrievers produce a more laid-back animal who doesn't act like Robo Cop. See [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#) for more details.

Get up and go!



WARNING If you're on the go and never home and your Golden's alone most of the day, he will be stressed and unhappy. That's not fair to the dog and may be disastrous for you. Golden Retrievers need to be with people, and an isolated and lonely Golden can easily suffer from separation anxiety, which will lead to destructive behavior. It's a natural canine stress reliever.

On the other hand, if you're an active family that loves the outdoor life and plan to take your Golden to soccer practice and baseball games, then the two of you are probably a good match.

Train, train, train

Smart as he is, a Golden Retriever will not train himself. Good manners are not included in his pedigree. It's up to you, the team captain, to teach your dog acceptable behavior — what he may and may not do at home and in the neighborhood. Obedience training is the only way to accomplish that. Few pet owners have the know-how, expertise, or motivation to do it solo, so training classes must be part of your agenda. That also means practicing

every day with your dog, or your once-a-week classes will be wasted.



WARNING Don't be misled by the over-used 10-minutes-a-day obedience slogan. Training is an ongoing process whenever you're with your dog and he's awake. If you can't or won't commit to raising your Golden as you would an infant or toddler, don't blame your Golden if he's wild or disobedient. See [Chapter 9](#) for more on teaching your Golden obedient behavior and good manners.

Love-'em-all

If you're looking for a guard dog, get rid of this book and investigate another breed. Most Golden Retrievers are complete love sponges who would happily lick the boots of an intruder. You can encourage them to bark at people who approach your house, but you can't — and shouldn't — teach them to intimidate or bite. Their very size may deter a home invader, but anyone familiar with a Golden's love-'em-all attitude knows that a scratch behind Golden ears means instant friendship.

That said, I firmly believe that my Golden family would sense any danger to me personally and would defend me to the death. Stories abound about Golden Retriever heroes who have protected children and adults who were in danger or threatened by some adversary.

Kids or dogs?

If you have kids under age 3 or 4 and you get a puppy, you will now have the equivalent of two or three kids under 3! Double your pleasure, and — you got it — twice the work. And a major communication problem.