

An Introduction to the Shiba Inu (part 2)

By Jacey Holden

Foreword

If you are really considering taking the plunge, then the next section is for you. Don't forget that Shiba people get really crazy about their dogs and owning a Shiba is not just owning a dog, but a way of life.

Food

Before bringing home your Shiba, it is best to have a supply of food on hand. Several boxes of granola, some oranges (for vitamin C) and a few sandwiches should give you enough energy to keep up with the little guy. Even though the Shiba would prefer to share your dinner, it is best to buy him a top quality dog food, one containing about 30% protein, and 15% to 18% fat. Do not think in terms of a human diet when feeding a puppy. An eight week old Shiba will eat approximately 1/3 cup of puppy food three times a day. He may be given this moistened in separate feedings, or, if he is not too greedy, he may have dry kibble available at all times. If he is being fed three times a day, gradually increase the food as he grows and his appetite increases. He may be cut to twice a day at about four months of age or if he loses interest in a meal. A healthy puppy is neither too fat nor too thin. You should be able to feel his ribs, backbone and hip bones, but not see them. An adult Shiba will eat from one to one and one half cups of kibble per day depending on his size and energy level. Spayed and neutered adults tend to put on extra weight. Besides giving them enough exercise, the quantity of food rather than the quality should be reduced. It is easier to prevent obesity than to correct it.



Housing

The Shiba is an excellent indoor/outdoor dog with a coat that will protect him from both heat and cold. He must have shelter from the sun in summer and storms in winter, but he can withstand a wide range of temperatures.

Unless you plan to give your Shiba all his exercise on a leash, a fenced yard is mandatory. Nothing is more devastating than discovering your beloved Shiba is an expensive carpet remnant on the street in front of your house. No amount of training will deter your little hunting dog from darting across the street to chase the neighbor's cat - at just the wrong time. This is true of any breed of dog. Dogs also dig and some climb. Check frequently for possible escape routes. A Shiba is safest indoors or in an escape-proof run when you are away from home.



A Shiba lives with the principle - su casa es mi casa. He will want to sleep on your bed, eat at your table and rest in your favorite chair. A puppy will also wish to dismantle your VCR wiring, chew the straps off your sandals, round the corners of your kitchen cabinets, and, if not watched closely, will definitely light up his life with the electric cords. If any of these behaviors disturbs you, you may wish to invest in a crate and possibly an exercise pen.

Crate Training

All puppies should be crate trained. Crates are the best way to housebreak a puppy. They also provide a safe refuge during the night and when the puppy can't be watched. A size 200 airline crate (as pictured below) will suit a Shiba for his entire life and will also fit on the back seat of almost any car. He can ride safely in a crate in the car, and, with a little ingenuity, a crate can be seat belted or bungied into place. You wouldn't drive around with your granddaughter running around in the back seat of the car or sitting on your lap and your dog shouldn't either.



When you're not home, you will never wonder where your puppy is or what he is doing if he is in a crate or exercise pen. Even though he may be exercised, keeping a puppy in a crate day and night is not good. It is akin to you staying in bed, going out jogging, and going back to bed again. While the puppy is small, a four by four foot exercise pen, setup in any room of the house, is an ideal place to leave the puppy while you are at work. This allows the puppy room to move around and play while keeping him safe and comfortable indoors. Putting a six by six foot piece of inexpensive linoleum under the pen will protect carpet and sensitive

flooring. Later, when the Shiba is mature, he may be allowed free access to the house or yard. Exercise pens continue to be of great service even when the puppy is grown. It can be used to block the puppy/dog from newly planted areas in the garden or prevent small children and puppies from reaching the Christmas tree. It can keep a dog's muddy paws off the sliding glass door, or keep them clean after bathing. You can even wrap it around yourself, the recliner and the remote so no one can reach you during football season. Options are unlimited. Crates and exercise pens may be purchased at almost any pet supply store. A short two to three foot pen with a removable top is often the best. The top keeps the pen stable and the puppy from climbing out or moving the pen around the room, and the size is lighter in weight and much less obtrusive in the house.

Exercise

Shibas are an active breed, but don't need many acres on which to run. They can get adequate exercise banking off the couch and spinning broodies on the bed, but to get in good condition, they need additional activity. Dogs like to go for walks with their people, and for many Shibas it is more exciting than eating. A wheelchair-bound Shiba owner takes his two dogs for a "walk" every day around the streets of suburbia, and a competitive mountain bike rider has his Shiba run with him for miles as he trains for grueling competition. But, the majority of people snaps on the retractable lead and make a morning (or evening) tour of the neighborhood. It is good exercise for both man and beast and a great way to make friends. Not everyone is responsible enough to keep his dog on leash. Watch for loose dogs roaming the area. A dog fight is not the best way to become acquainted with the neighbors and many Shibas take umbrage at having their space invaded.



Playtime with puppy

Given a choice, a Shiba puppy will usually pick human body parts as his favorite chew toys. Fingers and toes are preferred, especially if covered with socks or sandals. He will enjoy ankles, pant legs and the ultimate - shoelaces on the shoes you are wearing. If you wish to expand his horizons and preserve your flesh, a visit to the pet supply store is a fine place to start. Hardware stores also carry a supply of

delectable goodies such as the business end of a toilet plunger, handles for garden tools, and rubber galoshes. Around the house you may find old stuffed animals, socks that can be tied in knots, dirty sneakers, and tennis balls. A trip to the country can bring pine cones, sticks and oak galls which are excellent for dismembering outdoors. Shibas are not seriously destructive, but puppies are puppies, and puppies chew. Even adults like to gnaw on something occasionally. If your puppy chews the straps off your favorite sandals it will make you very angry, but don't take it out on him. It was your fault for leaving the sandals where the puppy could reach them. Dogs don't make mistakes, people do.



Some Shiba puppies play quite gently while others are very rough. They are used to tussling with siblings that have protective coats of fur. Shibas will often grab your wrist as you start to pet them. This is just the same thing he would do to another puppy that had come up to play. His sharp baby teeth pierce the skin and you think the puppy is biting. Also, when a puppy is playing with your clothing, he does not realize that you are right under there and he will bite much harder than he does on bare skin. This can be especially hard on children.

The best way to control a problem is to avoid the situation that precipitates it. Do not play with the puppy in a manner that allows him to chew on you. Distraction is a good technique for luring a puppy away from potential problems. A firm "no" with a good shaking or rap on the nose may deter him from repeating unacceptable behavior. Sometimes you must be quite firm. It is best to remain calm and think of the puppy as an overexcited 18 month old child. If you or the puppy becomes irritable, a "time out" in his crate or pen will give you both a cooling off period. Take heart, the puppy will calm with age and you can always have a party when the puppy "fangs" fall out.

Early Socialization

A trip to the mall or neighborhood park will bring you all the attention you can handle. This may be wonderful for a young man looking for a date, but it can be deadly for a small puppy. Until a puppy is fully immunized against parvovirus, at about the age of 16 weeks, it is not safe to take him to areas frequented by other dogs. Many people solve this problem by taking the dog to visit friends and relatives in "clean" environments and asking them to return the favor. A trip to the hardware store is safer than the pet store and the puppy can learn to ride in the cart and greet his public. Some Shibas may be shy of strangers while others are very outgoing. Some are quite playful and others are just dog aggressive. Early socialization is mandatory to obtain the best possible temperament from a puppy. Taking a risk on exposure to parvo is often a trade-off with the necessity of socialization. Think it out carefully and discuss it with the breeder as well as the veterinarian. Socialization does not end with puppy kindergarten. It is a lifelong process.

Training

It is well established that if you are not somewhat trainable and flexible, you will have a difficult time adjusting to a Shiba. Shibas want their owners to come when called, fetch when they want food, stay off the furniture they want for a nap and speak whenever someone wants to talk about Shibas.

Owners too feel they should be able to make a few polite requests from their dogs. Sometimes there is a small power struggle, but the owner must establish that he is in control. Shibas, like teenagers, have very selective hearing. They can totally ignore your commands to come, but be there in a shot if they hear the lid on the cookie jar. They may do what you want when on leash and never look back when free. Shibas aren't stupid. They know just what you want them to do and whether they can get away without doing it.



Housebreaking is easy and something that Shibas do naturally. If a puppy is taken out whenever he awakes from a nap or after a meal, he will almost never soil in the house and especially not in a restricted area such as a crate. A puppy as young as five weeks can hold his bowels all night, but not his bladder. He will want out or will wet on a blanket or paper in his exercise pen. As soon as the puppy figures where "out" is, he will try to go there to potty. This becomes easy when there is a door directly to a back yard.

Leash breaking is not as natural for the Shiba as housebreaking. It involves something they truly detest - restraint. Some Shibas can carry around their dislike for collar and leash all their lives. They do it in the form of the patent "Shiba shake," where they cock their heads sideways, as if something was in their ear, then stop and shake violently. Amazingly, this "ear problem" goes away as soon as the leash is removed, and returns the minute the dog is near the show ring.

To begin the leash breaking process, it is best to put a soft snug collar and let the puppy wear it around for a while. Attach a leash and let the puppy take you for a walk. You go where he goes. After a few times,



you can suggest that he follow you. He may pull back and scream a little, but that is natural. Encouragement and praise help, and soon he will be walking with you. Never leave a choke collar on an unattended puppy and never tie up a dog with a choke collar. A dog can easily hang himself by a choke collar just by getting tangled in something as simple as a bush. A "martingale" or "limited-slip" collar is probably the best for a Shiba. If adjusted properly, it will tighten enough so the dog can't back out and turn itself loose, but not tight enough to strangle the dog. Still, this type of collar should only be worn when taking walks. Collars with plastic snap-together clips are only good for hanging dog tags. They should never be used for walking a dog and they can easily break, pop open or pull over the dog's head, at just the wrong time.

The fiery aspect of the Shiba temperament is apparent at an early age. Even as puppies they stage mock battles and make much noise as they vie for top honors. With people they are all kissy-face, but with other dogs, and especially other Shibas, they are macho little muffins. There is a wide range of variation in this aspect of a young Shiba's temperament and difficulties should be discussed with the breeder. Many Shiba puppies are just playful and not quarrelsome, but others are more serious.

Some like to play with other dogs once they are acquainted while others never seem to adjust. They all fall within the range of "normal" Shiba temperament.

Just as there are hundreds of books on child rearing, there are as many theories on how to deal with canine temperament. Dog trainers who are not familiar with the Shiba temperament may only make problems worse.

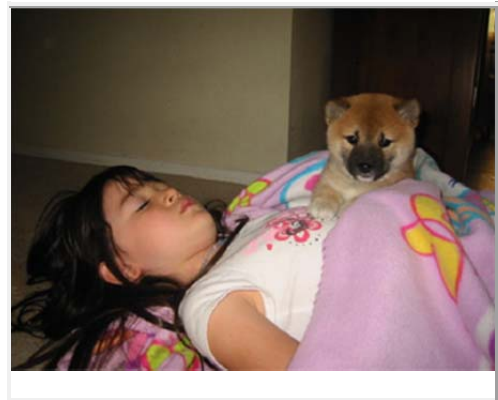
Shibas seem to work well with the reward system or "motivational method." They easily learn commands like sit, and down, and parlor tricks such as roll over, speak and sit up. Obedience work done on lead is readily acquired, but a Shiba who reliably "comes" on command in any situation is rare indeed. There are a few who learn boundaries, come when called, even when chasing a car, and can wander loose in any situation. These are exceptional and usually a combination of an extremely responsive temperament plus diligent training. It is realistic to expect that the average owner with the average Shiba will not have that situation. Most Shibas will not wander miles from home, but will want to investigate every nook and cranny within a larger radius that the owner is comfortable. Expect your Shiba to be an "on leash" breed and if he proves to be otherwise, then you are among the fortunate.



Do not feel your Shiba cannot be trained. Shibas love "agility" training, as it is a natural for their athletic ability. They are smart and enjoy activities that challenge their mind and body, easily becoming bored with excessive repetition. If you work with the Shiba nature rather than against it, training will be fun for both.

Shibas and Children

The responsible Shiba owner asks himself what type of child he would like for his favorite dog. It would be a child with a good nature and stable temperament, one that was gentle and most of all, easy to train. A child of an extremely energetic nature or whose hearing is too selective may be better suited to a larger more docile breed. Intractable children should have animals made of plastic or, maybe, cement. All dogs, and especially puppies, regard very small children as peers rather than superiors. Puppies will try to play with children as they would another puppy, particularly if the child falls on the floor or runs around making squealing noises. Some Shibas are afraid of very young children and alarmed by their sounds and quick movements. They will run from a toddler or hide when it approaches. This can lead to a fear-biting situation if the child pursues a frightened dog.



The responsibility of how a puppy interacts with children falls on the parents. Most trainable children over six years of age should have no trouble adjusting to a Shiba puppy. Dog oriented people find it easy acclimating a Shiba to a household with children. People with little dog experience should visit several households with Shibas. Do not fall in love with a Shiba at a dog show and immediately run out and buy one. Take time to visit the dogs in the home environment. See how they react to children and let your intuition be your best guide.



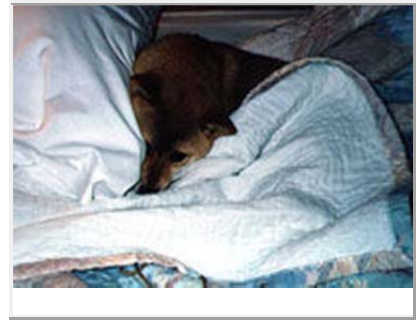
Black & Tan Shiba

When adults visit a home with Shiba puppies, they usually sit and wait for the puppies to come to them. Children tend to pursue the puppies. Shibas do not like to be continually restrained and manhandled. Although a well socialized puppy will tolerate some of this, too much will make him shy or irritated. It is absolutely necessary that a child learn to sit and let the puppy come to him. It is difficult to train a child, who is used to running in and out of the house at will, to close the door quickly and make sure the Shiba doesn't get out into an unfenced area. It is even more difficult to train the child's friends. Training the child when he is little can make him aware of the necessity of using a double door system or exercising caution when going in and out. But

ultimately, it is up to the parent to keep the puppy out of harm's way.

Veterinarians and Vaccinations

Since Shibas are a healthy, hardy little breed, they seldom need trips to the vet except for routine vaccinations and an occasional teeth cleaning. Your new puppy should be taken to the vet of your choice within a few days of purchase. Most breeders require this as part of the puppy's health guarantee. The vet should check his overall condition, his heart for possible murmurs, and a stool sample for parasites. A puppy should already have had at least one vaccination from the breeder prior to his sale. You can set up a continued vaccination schedule with your vet during this first check-up.



Puppies should have a complete set of vaccinations before exposing them to situations where many other dogs have been. These vaccinations are against distemper, hepatitis, kennel cough, parvovirus and coronavirus. Often the first shots do not contain a vaccine against leptospirosis (lepto). Lepto has frequently been fingered as the "bad guy" in vaccine reaction. Many breeders and veterinarians prefer to wait until the puppy is three to four months old before giving an injection with lepto. Several Shiba puppies have experienced an anaphylactoid reaction to a vaccine on their second injection, even when it did not contain lepto. This is the same severe allergic reaction some people experience when stung by a bee. Epinephrine must be administered immediately, so a veterinarian should be warned of the possibility of a reaction. A puppy should remain in the waiting room of the vet's office for 15 to 20 minutes after his injection to ensure there is no reaction. Rabies shots are given at four months of age. Rabies is the only vaccination required by law. All others are for the puppy's health.

Spay and Neutering

For many people, the decision to neuter a male dog is somehow tied into their own sexuality. Maybe it should be, for the amorous intentions of the stimulated male Shiba are only rivaled by those of Geraldo Rivera and Kid Rock. Neutering a male dog has a great effect on his temperament, if it is done at an early age. Neutering a male around the age of five months will usually prevent marking and other "big guy" ideas. Sometimes it takes up to eight months or more for a Shiba male's testicles to drop into the scrotum. They seldom fail to arrive, and if the vet can locate them at all, he can perform the castration. Don't postpone it.

Many people would rather have a female as a pet. They see the female as having a gentler nature and not having the desire to continually mark territory. Spaying a female does little to change her basic temperament, it just prevents pregnancy. Females should be spayed at about five months of age before they have their first heat cycle. This makes it easier on the little girl as the uterus is small and the female lean. Recovery is quick and after a few days, you won't know anything has been done. Both sexes make good pets and have equally affectionate natures.

Coat

Shibas shed. You would too if you were wearing a wool coat in summer. Once you have a Shiba, your home will never be completely fur free again. All dogs with double coats shed, even Dobermans and Labradors. Those breeds with single coats that don't shed, such as poodles and some terriers, need clipping or constant brushing to keep their coats from matting. You have a choice - clip, brush or vacuum. Shibas generally "blow" coat twice a year, but neutered animals will frequently just shed a little bit at a time without shedding completely. It varies with individuals, but you can usually count on a Shiba to have a full coat for Christmas. A Shiba could go his whole life without every experiencing a brush, comb or bath and be just as healthy and happy. Shibas have little odor to their fur unless they have rolled in something pungent. Show dogs are often bathed weekly while pets are occasionally shampooed at the owner's whim. All seem to have healthy coats.

Fleas

Fleas are the scourge of pet ownership. The flea most commonly found on the dog is the cat flea. Cats are flea farmers and outdoor cats spread fleas from yard to yard like dandelion seeds. Methods of treatment are so varied and controversial that they are a book in themselves. If fleas are eradicated from the environment, they will soon vanish from the dog. Fleas like warm, moist, sheltered surroundings and do not tolerate direct sun, dryness or extreme cold. Fleas do not survive outdoors in arid climates, but thrive in the warm, damp summers of the majority of the U.S.



There are so many products on the market it is difficult to decide which one is best for the Shiba. Products such as Front Line™ and Advantage™ are proven effective and not detrimental to the dog since they stay in the dermal layer and do not go through the dog's system. Just a couple of drops on the dog's shoulder blades will kill the fleas before they even bite the dog, and one application is supposed to last one to three months depending on how much the dog is bathed and how severe the infestation. This and similar products are the greatest things for dogs since vaccinations. People who never had to fight fleas before these products were available cannot appreciate them any more than people who never had to manage their lives without a computer and cell phone.

There is a product called Program™, which renders the eggs of a female flea unable to hatch after she has bitten a dog that has taken the medication. It can be used in combination with topical medicines such as dips and powders, but does not prevent re-infestation from the outside (the neighbor's cat). Also, the adult flea will continue to live out its life on the dog, grazing its way from tail to nose for about three months.

This is enough time for a Shiba to go ballistic, even if it only has one flea. This product preceded the above mentioned preparations and is rather outdated. Sentinel™ is the next generation of this product guards against heartworms, adult roundworms, adult hookworms and whipworms, and prevents the development of flea eggs. It does not kill adult fleas on the dog and is available only by prescription.

Revolution™ has a broad range of efficacy, protecting against fleas, ticks, sarcoptic mange, ear mites, heartworm, and some internal parasites. Although it is applied topically, it is absorbed into tissues and the bloodstream. It has a greater risk of side effects and must be used under veterinary supervision.

As a measure of economy it is tempting to use inexpensive topical preparations containing pyrethrins or permethrin (a synthetic pyrethrin). These are the same products used in common garden sprays and dusts. They are less effective than the above mentioned products and seem to have greater risk of toxicity.

New preparations are frequently coming on the market. Following a veterinarian's advice is always the most important way to manage internal and external parasites on a dog.

Collars & Microchipping

It is a good idea for a Shiba to wear a collar with identification tags or plates attached. Some collar distributors will print the owner's phone number right on the collar in large letters that can be seen without touching the dog. Unfortunately, many Shibas that end up in the pound have lost their collars. Show dogs can't wear collars because it leaves a ring around the neck. Rolled leather collars are the easiest on the dog's coat. Do not walk your dog with the identification and tag collar. Go to the "Training" section to see appropriate collars for walking your dog.



Microchipping a pet is not the wave of the future, but here and now. If nothing else, Hurricane Katrina taught us the necessity of this practice. Microchipped dogs that were lost or left behind were readily returned to their owners. Those that were not permanently identified may still be in shelters – or worse. Think of it as part of the mandatory four month visit to the vet for final vaccinations and a microchip and DO NOT forget to register the dog's microchip with the issuing company so the dog will be returned to the proper person. Remember that too when your address or phone number is changed.

How To Learn More

The best place to learn about Shibas is from other Shiba owners. There are no dumb questions. Just ask. The breeder of your puppy should be your primary source of information. Sometimes this is difficult as the breeder may live far away or be extremely hard to contact. Ask the breeder for names of other Shiba owners in your area and feel free to contact them. People love to talk about their dogs. Organize a gathering of Shiba owners in your area and have a potluck



It's a Shiba owner's support group!