

Information to Help You Identify a Leonberger

Leonberger

If you have access to the web, the Leonberger breed standard describes the ideal appearance and manner of an adult female or male Leo. Note that there are natural variations from the standard, even among a litter born of two pure bred Leonbergers.

COLOR

Typical Leo puppies are born solid black, weighing approximately .5 – 1.5 pounds each in litters that may range in size from one single pup to fifteen puppies. As they grow, they “grow out” of their black color, but leave it in the facial mask and black chevron at the base of the tail. The predominant color may be gold, red-brown, tawny, sand or appear black due to black outer guard hairs. The exceptions are the Leonberger Black & Tans; these dogs have reverse colorations of the standard: a brown mask on a black dog.

COAT

The Leo coat may be straight or slightly curly and has an undercoat. There are “feathers” or “pantaloon” on all four legs and a thickened “ruff” around the neck. Typically, this ruff is more pronounced in the male dog and gives the appearance of a lion’s mane. Don’t forget that coat texture, length and appearance can vary widely due to poor nutrition or neglect.

SIZE

Leos are a giant breed, closely related to the Newfoundland, St. Bernard and Great Pyrenees. The size and body shape is similar. Males measure approximately 28-31” at the shoulder and weigh 110-170 lbs and females typically stand 26-29” at the shoulder and weigh 90-140 lbs.

TEMPERAMENT/ACTIONS

By nature, Leos are a companion dog. While officially in the Working Group, and able to perform many tasks, they are bred primarily to be family dogs with a stable, people-oriented personality. They alert to unusual sounds and activities, however, they do not have an urgent drive to patrol and protect territory. They want to be with people and are unhappy when left out of the pack (in contrast to a flock-guarding dog who may work independently). A properly socialized Leo welcomes human attention and returns it with Leo Licks, belly-ups, and goofy attempts to get more affection. However, remember that most dogs who are stressed by abuse, lack of proper health care or nutrition, or long-term kenneling show personality changes (temporary or not). Leos that are not socialized during puppy hood and adolescence may show uncharacteristically aggressive behavior.

OTHER LEO FEATURES

Most Leos do not drool because their lips fit close to their gums and teeth. All Leos have webbed toes. Most have an identifiable chevron-shaped black mark in the hair on the tail, approximately four inches from the base.

RULING OUT OTHER PURE BREEDS

There are other breeds that resemble the Leonberger, including the Estella Mountain Dog, the Sarpliniac, the Caucasian Mountain Dog, the Tibetan Mastiff, and others. It is important to make an effort to distinguish between these breeds. There are differences in temperaments and the daily activities that make these dogs happy. If you suspect you may have a dog from a different breed, contact the appropriate rescue group to help you accurately identify the dog in question.

RECOGNIZING LEO MIXES

There are many canine crossbreeding pairs that produce dogs with a Leo-like appearance. Describe a Leo to someone who has never seen one... "a non-drooling Newfie head on the biggest Golden Retriever you ever saw, wearing a lion's mane?" Take your time and look at the dog from many angles. Consider his size and weight for his age! Think in "tens," a 4-month-old Leo weighs 40 pounds, so a one-year-old dog is not going to weigh 35 pounds. Ask yourself what makes you think "Leo" when you see him? Then, what characteristics strike you wrong about the dog? Are his ears set high on his head and pointed like Chow ears? Does he have the Chow's round, bear-like face? What about the blue tongue? Leos don't have a blue tongue. German shepherd and Golden Retriever crosses are tricky. But look for those webbed toes. Saint Bernard crosses will most likely show heavier bone, loose jowls and more drool. But, since St. Bernards are 1/3 of a Leo's heritage...good luck!

LEONBERGERS, AS RECOGNIZED BY LEOPALS

LeoPALS, Inc., exists through the support and generosity of individuals devoted to the Leonberger breed and to animals of all kinds. We offer assistance to purebred Leonbergers with and without pedigrees, and to dogs of unknown origin that embody the look and characteristics of our breed. While we wish we could help every dog we encounter, we do not use money donated for Leos to rescue dogs that the group does not believe to be Leonbergers. LeoRescuePals intends to establish strong bonds with many other rescue operations and we encourage our volunteers to suggest ways we might assist a dog who proves, upon evaluation, not to be a Leo. As time and resources permit, and with separate funding, this organization may be able to avoid leaving any dog we evaluate behind.

TOOLS

Bring a pen and paper (to note descriptions) and a camera, in case you are unsure of the identification and want to consult with others. Bring the phone number of the person who asked you to check on the dog. In case the dog is a Leo, arrive prepared with water, a leash, and a safe manner for the dog to travel in your car.