

18 Good Dogs for Seniors Who Want or Need a Furry Companion



Choosing good dogs, for seniors or anyone else, can be a fun and enriching process. But it starts with assessing the needs and wants of a prospective owner (which might be you or a loved one). After all, everyone has a unique set of preferences, so the kind of dog that makes the best pet will vary from one older adult to another. Some seniors gravitate toward smaller dogs that can cuddle in a lap, while others prefer larger dogs that can romp around and play fetch. Ultimately, any breed of dog is good for older people if it meshes with their abilities, likes, and lifestyles.

This article will help you figure out what factors you need to consider in your search for the perfect canine companion. You'll also read about 18 specific breeds that are among the best dogs for seniors, including a range of both small dogs and large dogs. You'll explore the uses of (and distinctions between) therapy, support, and service dogs. And you'll learn about the emerging trend of robot pets.

So keep reading. The information may just help you achieve greater vitality. After all, it's well established that dog ownership can lower people's stress and blood pressure levels. Having a dog

is a great way to get some exercise, socialize with others in your community, and enjoy the benefits of companionship. Many seniors also thrive on the experience of nurturing and caring for another living being.

How to Choose the Best Dog for an Older Person

You can enjoy the many advantages of dog ownership at any age, but it's important to find the right animal. Here are some factors to weigh when selecting a dog:

- **Energy level**—Some breeds require more exercise than others. If you're fairly active, you may be able to handle a dog that needs lots of play time and opportunities to run. But if you have mobility or stamina issues, you might want to choose a dog that is content with a few short walks. Some very small dogs may even be able to get all the exercise they need just by running around inside your home.
- **Size**—Smaller dogs are easier to keep under control and are more suitable for seniors living in condos, apartments, or care facilities. Small dogs can fit in your lap, are more portable than larger breeds, won't physically overwhelm you, and can be easily washed in a sink. However, some small dogs have lots of nervous energy and try to make up for their diminutive stature with plenty of barking. (This doesn't always hold true, though: Among dogs that bark the least are smaller breeds like the pug and the Boston terrier). Alternatively, docile larger dogs that don't require a lot of maintenance may be a good choice.
- **Age**—Older dogs are better dogs for seniors to adopt than puppies that are super active and tend to chew and nip. (Most dogs are considered to be "seniors" when they reach about age seven.) Adult dogs are typically already house trained and well-socialized with people. Mature dogs also tend to be the calmest dogs, with more predictable behavior patterns. In addition, it's wise to think about the life expectancy of different dogs and how likely it is that your pet will outlive you. Who will take care of your dog if you aren't around to do so?
- **Temperament**—Dogs' temperaments are influenced by the genes they are born with as well as the way they are brought up. While any dog can be raised to be friendly, some breeds are more naturally conditioned to be gentle and welcoming. Beagles, retrievers, poodles, and bulldogs are among the dogs that have the best temperament. But keep in mind that every animal has a unique personality. Try to interact with any potential pet you are considering in order to get a feel for how well-suited you are to each other.
- **Grooming requirements**—Some breeds need to be bathed, trimmed, and clipped regularly, while others just need a quick brush every so often. Be sure to choose a dog whose needs you can manage, either by yourself or with the help of a family member or professional groomer.

8 of the Overall Best Companion Dogs for Seniors

What are some of the best companion dog breeds? Elderly people have a wide range of needs and preferences, so the perfect pet for one senior may be entirely unsuitable for another. That said, some breeds have certain combinations of traits that make them popular choices for retirees. Here are eight of the top companion dogs for older adults:

1. Poodle

Thanks to their extraordinary intelligence and highly trainable nature, poodles are good companion dogs. They form a strong bond with more than one member of their human families and are one of the best dogs for couples. They are sweet, gentle, and loving animals. Poodles need a daily walk but are otherwise content to play or just lie on the couch. They don't shed, but they do need to be groomed every month or so. You can choose from three sizes of poodle: toy, miniature, or standard.

2. Cavalier King Charles spaniel

These quiet, small dogs make some of the best lap dogs for seniors. They love nothing better than snuggling up with their owners, and they get along extremely well with adults, children, and other pets. Active and playful, they are also intelligent and easy to train. Their long, soft, beautiful coat requires regular grooming and an occasional bath. Keep in mind that this dog breed loves to chase things; you'll need a long leash or a fenced yard.

3. Boston terrier

Looking for a smaller-sized companion dog who will be utterly devoted to you? Boston terriers are adaptable, friendly, mild-tempered dogs whose favorite activity is sitting peacefully with their owners. They are easy to train and don't bark much, which makes them well-suited to apartment or condo life. Their grooming needs are minimal, since their short, smooth coat (which resembles a black-and-white tuxedo) is easy to care for. They don't do well in hot weather, though.

4. Maltese

Weighing in at just four to seven pounds, the tiny Maltese is widely regarded as the quintessential lap dog. Bright, gentle, and playful, these dogs get along well with other pets and are extremely attentive to their owners' moods. (In fact, they are frequently used as therapy dogs.) While they don't need a lot of outdoor exercise, they do like going for short walks and dashing around the house. Their silky white coat doesn't shed but does require daily brushing and weekly bathing.

5. Pembroke Welsh corgi

Intelligent and lively, Pembroke Welsh corgis are high-energy dogs that live for human attention and are big on pleasing their owners. They are famous for being the favorite pets of Queen Elizabeth II. They have squat bodies and short legs, and they typically weigh between 25 and 30 pounds. Originally bred as herding dogs, corgis love hiking and being outside, and they need frequent daily walks. They have a protective nature and make good watchdogs. However, they can be prone to barking.

6. Beagle

Are you an active outdoorsy type who enjoys long walks? You might get along well with a beagle. These dogs are energetic, sociable animals who love to play. They are friendly, fun, easygoing characters who consider every person they meet to be their new best buddy. Bred as hunting hounds, beagles are a scent-driven breed and will take off in pursuit of an interesting smell. It's important to have a securely fenced yard and supervise these dogs closely.

7. Pomeranian

Pomeranians are small companion dogs that are smart, lively, and affectionate. They are very curious and love attention, making them a good option for older adults who can give them lots of time and energy. They should be brushed at least a couple times a week to keep their fluffy coats healthy and shiny. Poms are proud and aren't naturally inclined to take direction from others, but firm, gentle leadership can train them not to be unruly. They do tend to be loud, however.

8. Chihuahua

Chihuahuas are tiny dogs that are full of personality. Few other breeds are as quirky and entertaining. Lively and spunky, chihuahuas are loyal companions who love to sit in their owners' laps and be petted. They are good apartment animals but need to be trained to deal with strangers and children. Chihuahuas enjoy going for walks and basking in the sun, but they cannot handle cold weather. Fortunately, because they are so small, they can often fill their exercise needs indoors.

7 Small Dogs That Aren't Yappy

The best small companion dog is a matter of personal preference. Many older adults look for small, calm dogs that don't bark without a good reason and aren't over-exuberant. By that measure, small dogs that make the best pets include the odd-looking but charming pug as well as little white lap dogs like the shih tzu and bichon frise. (The Cavalier King Charles spaniel and the Boston terrier, described in the above section, would also qualify). Check out the following examples of calm, small dogs that are not yappy:

1. Pug

Pugs may be the best small dogs for seniors who would rather cuddle with their pooch in an armchair than take it out hiking every day. These animals don't need much exercise and can't handle temperature extremes, so they spend much of their time indoors. Childlike, loyal, and affectionate, pugs are devoted to their owners and love to nap. They aren't really barkers, although they tend to snore. Pugs require little grooming.

2. Bichon frise

The bichon frise is an intelligent, obedient, and affectionate breed. These dogs love to snuggle with their people and are highly compatible with other household pets. They have a pleasant, cheerful nature and are perfectly content to spend much of the day chilling indoors; a couple short walks each day is enough to meet their exercise needs. They don't shed, but they do require frequent brushing and grooming.

3. French bulldog

If your idea of the perfect companion is a quiet, amiable dog who readily adapts to apartment life, you may want to consider a French bulldog. Spirited but not yappy, Frenchies thrive on plenty of human contact. They have low exercise needs and are happy with short walks or a bit of playtime in the yard—but not when temperatures soar. (These dogs are prone to heat exhaustion.) Regular brushings are all the grooming that's required.

4. Shih tzu

Shih tzus always want to be by their owners' sides and are good small dogs for seniors. This breed lives for cuddles and attention. Shih tzus are excellent lap dogs and take a welcoming attitude toward strange people as well as other pets. Playful but not overly active, these dogs get enough activity through short daily walks. They are highly adaptable and can thrive equally well in a large suburban house or a small city condo.

5. Havanese

Small, fuzzy, and eager to please, the Havanese is an excellent choice for retirees who can spend lots of time with their pets. These dogs get along with everybody but are happiest in their owners' company. They are smart animals that are easy to train; many work as [therapy dogs](#). They have cheerful dispositions and adore being the center of attention. A walk each day will keep them satisfied. Their long coat requires frequent brushing but can be kept short for lower maintenance.

6. Lhasa apso

Whether you want to wander around outside or just relax on the couch, lhasa apsos will happily join you. They are one of the calmest small dog breeds out there and do very well in apartments. Friendly and affectionate with their owners, these dogs are very protective but don't bark without cause. They are more independent than many other breeds and can be left alone. Their long, flowing coats do take a lot of grooming, however.

7. Bolognese

Another cuddly, fluffy white dog, the Bolognese is playful, smart, and easy to train. These animals worship their owners and shadow them everywhere. Not super active, Bolognese dogs don't need much exercise and are perfectly willing to be couch potatoes, so long as they can stay near you. They are calm and quiet and adapt well to all types of living spaces. They must be bathed and groomed regularly to keep their curly locks in good condition.

3 of the Best Large Dog Breeds for Seniors

Bigger dogs are often very playful when they're outside, but calm when they're indoors. Provided you have a large yard or open space for them to burn off their energy, they can be very good companions. Some older adults feel more secure with a large dog around that can intimidate unwanted visitors (even though many big dogs are actually gentle giants). Here are three options you may want to consider:

8. Labrador retriever

Labrador retrievers are one of the most popular dog breeds in America, and no wonder: With their warm, friendly disposition, outgoing personality, and love of human camaraderie, Labs make excellent companions. They adapt well to training as [service dogs](#) and are among the best dog breeds for anxiety sufferers. Labs are cheerful and even-

tempered, but these big dogs are also highly energetic and require lots of physical exercise (think swimming and playing fetch).

9. Golden retriever

Like Labs, golden retrievers are kind, friendly people-pleasers who respond well to training and are well-attuned to the emotional needs of humans, putting them among the most popular therapy dog breeds. They are best suited to active lifestyles and love to run, hike, and swim. If they get enough outdoor exercise, they can be fairly mellow indoors. They thrive on companionship and are renowned for their patience with all types of people.

Therapy, Support, and Service Dogs for Seniors

Service dogs have a long history of assisting older adults with special needs related to blindness and deafness, but these days, they are helping with a much broader range of disabilities. Did you know there are even service dogs for dementia sufferers? It's true. Dogs help dementia patients by lowering their anxiety and helping them become more interactive. In fact, in one study, Alzheimer's patients had dramatically fewer behavior issues once a specially trained dog took up residence in the care unit.¹

Some people get confused about the differences between service dogs, therapy dogs, and emotional support dogs. The terms are not interchangeable, and it's important to understand the distinctions.

Service dogs undergo specialized training in order to perform assistance tasks for a person with a disability. (Because the training is so extensive, it costs anywhere from \$15,000 to \$30,000 to get a service dog.) They are protected by the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and are legally allowed to accompany their human companions on buses and into public buildings like restaurants and stores. Service dogs for elderly people can do things like wake owners up, fetch medication, pick up dropped items for owners in wheelchairs, guide owners with impaired vision, and keep owners with dementia from wandering out of the house alone. They should not be petted, as that could distract them from the job they are doing.

Therapy dogs are specifically trained to provide comfort and psychological support to people other than their owners. They visit people in hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living facilities, retirement communities, hospices, rehabilitation centers, and other settings. Therapy dogs must have friendly, stable temperaments, since they are meant to be petted and handled by many different people. These dogs are not covered by the ADA and do not have the same access rights to public spaces.

Emotional support dogs are pets that comfort and ease anxiety and stress in their owners. While any type of dog can perform this role, Labs, golden retrievers, poodles, pugs, and Cavalier King Charles spaniels often make good emotional support dogs. They don't require any special training and are also not covered by the ADA. They do have more legal protections than therapy dogs, however. For instance, under the Fair Housing Act, emotional support dogs are allowed to live with their owners in housing complexes that don't normally allow pets, provided the owner's doctor has recommended it.

Robot Dogs: A Growing Trend

Some older adults who can no longer care for a pet—or who move into facilities that don't allow animals—are finding joy and comfort with lifelike robotic dogs such as Hasbro's Companion Pet Golden Pup. These high-tech pooches look, move, and sound like the real thing: They sport realistic fur along with built-in sensors that listen for vocal cues and respond to human touch.

Because they can soothe anxiety and generate nurturing feelings without having to be walked, fed, or bathed, robot dogs can be excellent companions for seniors. In fact, research has shown that robotic dogs can be very effective at reducing loneliness in nursing home residents.² They are definitely an option to consider if you or someone you love needs a low-maintenance pet.

Find the Perfect Pooch

Good dogs for seniors are ones that closely match their owners' abilities and preferences. Whether you're looking for a dog that's big or small, active or sedate (or even robotic), you can find a furry friend that's right for you.