

The Complete A-Z Guide To The Cocker Spaniel

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Published by Sharda Baker



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Foreword

Because of its cuddly appearance and legend as a friendly companion, not many people realize that the Cocker Spaniel has the distinction of being the smallest member of the sporting or gundog group.

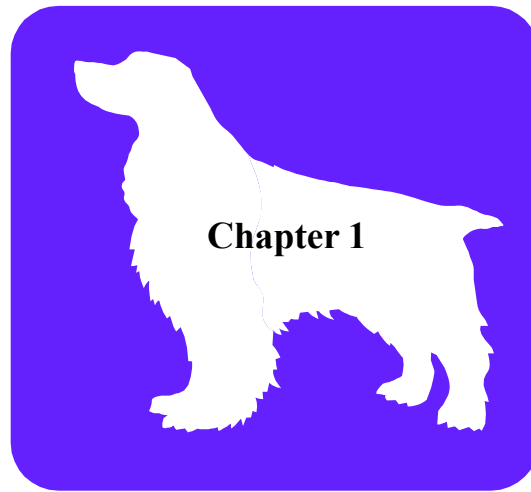
Sporting dogs are naturally active and attentive, making them affable, well-rounded companions. They have extraordinary instincts in water and woods, many of these breeds continue to participate in hunting and other field activities. The Cocker Spaniel in particular is an excellent companion but it can also be used for hunting, tracking, retrieving, watch-dogging and agility.

Potential owners should be aware that “Cockers” and sporting dogs in general—need regular, brisk exercise. So the Cocker Spaniel might be best suited to active owners or homes with sufficient play space. You might think all this energy to expend is great for homes with children but this isn’t necessarily the case as you will discover in the section on Temperament.

Other members of the sporting group include Pointers, Retrievers, and Setters.

The information in this book is geared toward purebred Cocker Spaniels. Not all purebreds will exhibit all traits and mixed-breeds may or may not possess these traits. As with any dog, it is important to remember that each animal has its own personality and regardless of pedigree will exhibit traits unique to its own character.





Introduction

The Man / Wolf Connection

Wolves. Cats. Birds. Reptiles. The list of domesticated animals that once roamed the land, swam the seas, or flew the skies in prehistoric times goes on and on. Over millennia they changed to adapt to the environment and bred to create new breeds. The dog is widely considered the first animal to be domesticated although the exact timeline and process isn't known with certainty.

First domesticated in the Mesolithic or Middle Stone Age (11,000 – 9,000 BC), the dog has certainly earned its reputation as man's best friend over centuries as his companion, hunting partner, security system, bounty hunter and laborer. It is believed man and wolf began their relationship hunting in their respective packs, slowly changing from hunting rivals to partners.

One theory of domestication says that barriers between wolf and humans began to break down—possibly as the result of orphaned pups. New generations of wolf pups accompanied the men on hunts, providing their natural abilities to follow a scent and quickly chase down prey, creating a mutual reliance on attaining food and skins for clothing. Eventually, the humans also provided shelter to their four-legged hunting partners.

A similar theory speculates that wolves were first attracted to camps by the scent of food and garbage. Once the wolves claimed squatters' rights and their coexistence with man was firmly established, they began to protect their new territories. In turn, man benefited from having automatic garbage disposals and alarm systems on site; awarding the descendents of domesticated wolves a permanent place in the home. This theory seems to be supported by the relationship between some indigenous New Guinea tribes and their dogs.

There are a number of other theories of varying plausibility, but regardless of which is accurate, the bond between man and domesticated wolf was inextricably formed by our hunter-gatherer ancestors.

Emergence of the Dog

Again, the exact timeline is unknown but some time over the next 10,000 years humans began to take an active role in breeding dogs, fostering certain characteristics for particular uses.

Civilizations that developed in both the eastern and western hemispheres depended on dogs for a number of uses in their struggle for survival. Asians, Egyptians, Assyrians, Greeks, and Romans used dogs as guards, companions, and hunters as well as in times of war.

Archaeological discoveries, cave drawings, wall paintings, ancient artifacts and written records depict the role of dogs in early cultures throughout all parts of the world. Native Americans in North and South America had several of their own dog breeds before the first European ever set foot on western soil.

In the first century A.D. the Romans wrote what might be considered the first book on dog breeding, including notes for fostering the best traits in guard dogs and sheepdogs. They also created the first classification system defining dogs as house dogs, shepherd dogs, sporting dogs, war dogs, dogs that ran by scent and dogs that ran by sight.

Due to years of intentional and natural cross-breeding and in-breeding, today's dogs bear little resemblance to those of the Roman era. However, there a number of classification systems in place today that can be considered descendants of this ancient system.

History of the Cocker Spaniel

The exact origin of the Spaniel family is a bit fuzzy, and the longer a breed has been around the more difficult it is to pin down. While there is evidence of the spaniel in France and Switzerland, its ancient origins are believed to come from Spain.

There is mention of the "Spanyell" in European society dating as far back as the 14th century but it wasn't until the 1800s that small spaniels were widely developed in England to help flush and retrieve game. The best hunters were used for breeding, which created a generation of skilled hunters but the characteristics of these puppies were inconsistent, so a split was made.

Essentially only the sizes of the puppies mattered and The Kennel Club (England) divided the dogs by weight alone. Dogs weighing less than 25 lbs were classed as Cocker Spaniels; as their primary use was to hunt a game bird called the woodcock. Those weighing over 25 lbs became known as the Springer Spaniel; the name being derived from their ability to "spring" game.

Cockers are to this day the smallest in the sporting and gundog groups.

The Cocker has been exhibited in the U.S. since the early 1880s. In 1883 classes were provided for the breed at English bench shows. In 1892 the breed was given breed status in England's Kennel Clubs stud book.

The American Cocker has evolved somewhat differently in type, size, and coloring from the breed now recognized as the English Cocker Spaniel. By the 1930s the American variety had become so different from its English ancestors that it received status as a separate breed by The

Kennel Club. The American Kennel Club granted a separate breed designation for the English Cocker Spaniel in 1946.

The Field Trial Club began field trials for the breed in the U.S. in the 1920s. Although most commonly known today as an excellent family companion, the Cocker's inherent desire to hunt still makes him a capable sporting dog with diligent training.

Differences

The term 'Cocker Spaniel' refers only to one of two breeds of dog. It is generally understood to be the American Cocker Spaniel within the U.S. and the English Cocker Spaniel outside of the U.S. There are "toy" spaniels such as the English Toy Spaniel, also known as the King Charles Spaniel, but they are *not* Cocker Spaniels and have their own breed classification.

To most of us, the differences between the American and English breeds may not be so obvious but competition judges know exactly what characteristic differences to look for.

As already noted, the English is slightly larger. The heads are shaped differently with the American being more dome-shaped and having a more pronounced stop and clearly defined eyebrows. The American breed's lips tend to hang down farther and more loosely. Its eyes are also larger and set so that they look straighter forward than the English. Lastly, the American's coat is much more abundant than the English.



**American
Cocker Spaniel
(left)**

**English
Cocker Spaniel
(right)**





Physical Characteristics

Appearance

The cocker spaniel is a medium-sized handsome dog. The head is round with a smooth forehead. The muzzle is broad, the jaws square and the ears hang long. The tail is often docked around the time of birth. The American cocker has a slightly more chiseled head and shorter muzzle than the English version.

The Cocker Spaniel's coat is luxurious and dense with heavy feathering on the legs and underside, just right for dragging through the mud and onto your carpets. It is silky, slightly wavy and of medium length. The American cocker's hair coat is a little longer than the English cocker. Both breeds have a thick undercoat that protects them from cold and damp weather.

Size

The Cocker Spaniel is small to medium in size. American males average 15 ½ inches (38cm) in height and females around 14 ½ inches (36.8cm). They can weigh between 15-25 pounds (7-14 kg). The English breed is slightly larger with males standing 16 to 17 inches in height; females 15 to 16, weighing 26-34 lbs.

Their size can make them good for apartments or small yards as long as they are able to be active when confined. With a life expectancy between 12 and 15 years, the Cocker will bring years of enjoyment and companionship to its owner.

Coloring

The American Kennel Club (AKC) recognizes 13 standard color classes and seven alternate classes. This can range anywhere from the familiar solid-color buff or light beige to brown, black or a parti-colored combination. Unless you have plans to show your dog these officially recognized color classes probably won't matter much to you but we present them in table 1.1.

Table 1.1 AKC Color Classes

Standard Colors		Alternate Colors
Black	Brown White & Tan	Blue Roan *
Black & Tan	Buff	Blue Roan* & Tan
Black & White	Buff & White	Cream
Black White & Tan	Red	Golden
Brown	Red & White	Red Roan*
Brown & Tan	Silver	Sable
Brown & White		Sable & White

* Roaning is the fine mixture of white hairs with colored hairs. Color definitions may vary by breed.

There is another rare color called merle. Merle is often accepted in other breeds but for the cocker spaniel it is not an officially recognized pattern. There is an entire field of science that studies coat colors in dogs but in its simplest terms a merle-colored coat is the result of a gene that dilutes the coat color and oftentimes produces light blue or gray eyes.

A merle cocker makes a striking vision and can be bred with any other color cocker but should *never* be bred with another merle as it may result in serious birth defects or stillbirths.

Temperament

The well-tempered cocker spaniel typically exhibits the following traits:

- friendly
- outgoing
- happy
- eager to please
- trusting
- intelligent

They are easygoing and do well with consistent and gentle training. They do not respond well to rough or harsh training so tenderness and patience are key components of a good training program. You'll find more training tips in the chapter on Training.

The part of the cocker personality that makes harsh training intolerable can also mean they don't tolerate nonsense well and can feel overwhelmed by quick movements and noise, such as those of small children; resulting in stress, shyness and occasionally defensive biting. The cocker will do best with older children but if you insist on having one with small children in the home, you should teach your child proper dog etiquette: no sneak attacks, no jerky or quick movements, no yelling at the dog and do not put hands or face in the dog's face, etc.

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Like children, each dog has a different personality, energy and patience level. So each dog and child relationship should be considered on an individual basis. Puppies will generally adapt to children better than adults because they have the opportunity to grow up together and neither the child nor the Cocker is set in an unbreakable pattern of behavior.

Unfortunately, the popularity of the breed has led to considerable bad breeding and some lines may have dogs that tend to be fearful or dominant. Submissive urination and resource guarding can also occur.

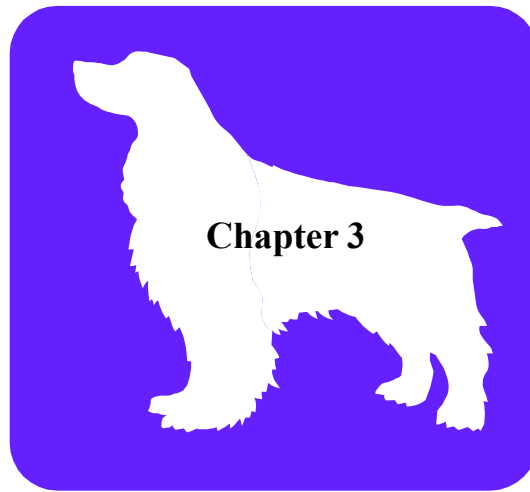
As with any dog, it's best to know as much as possible about the breeder, seller, and lineage of the dog as possible.

If your interest in the Cocker Spaniel goes beyond that of companion and you wish to show or breed your dog, you'll want a specimen that meets the defined breed standard. Meeting this standard should also be the goal of every reputable breeder, so knowing this information will help you choose a breeder and Cocker wisely.

Each nation and organization has its own breed standards. In the next section we provide an adaptation of the AKC standard. Be forewarned that you may wish to grab a bottle of water for this section as the language tends to be quite dry.

We also suggest that you check the breed standards of the certifying organization in your host county as they may vary.





Breed Standards

(American)

General Appearance

As the smallest member of the sporting group, the ideal cocker spaniel is sturdy with a compact body. The overall dog should be in balance and of ideal size as noted below.

When standing, the Cocker's head and forequarters are held high above muscular shoulders with its forelegs straight and perpendicular to the ground. Its topline (back) slopes slightly toward moderately bent, muscular quarters.

Despite its moderate size, the Cocker is capable of considerable speed and endurance. Its personality is free and cheerful and the animal is sound and well balanced throughout. When in action he shows a keen tendency to work.

Size and Proportion

Size – The ideal height for an adult male is 15 inches and for a female, 14 inches. It is acceptable for height to vary one-half inch above or below this ideal; however, a Cocker whose height exceeds the upper limit (15½" male, 14½" female) is disqualified. An adult male whose height is less than 14½ inches and an adult female whose height is less than 13½ inches is acceptable but penalized.

The height is measured from the top of the shoulder blades to the ground with the dog standing naturally with its forelegs and lower hind legs parallel to the line of measurement.

Proportion – In order for the Cocker to be properly proportioned, he should be longer than he is tall. In other words, the measurement from the breast bone to the back of the thigh is slightly

longer than that from the highest point of his withers (shoulders) to the ground. He should be long enough to allow for a straight and free stride; never appearing long and low.

Head

The head must be in balance with the rest of the dog. A well-proportioned head embodies the following characteristics:

Expression – The expression is intelligent, alert, soft and appealing.

Eyes – Eyeballs are round and full, looking directly forward. The eye is slightly almond shaped and is not weak or goggled. The iris is dark brown and in general, the darker the better.

Ears – The long, flowing ears are a distinctive feature of the Cocker Spaniel and as such, they should be set inline and begin no higher than the lower part of the eyes. They should be “leather fine and extending to nostrils” with long silky, straight or wavy hair.

Skull – The skull is well-rounded but not exaggerated and without flatness. Clearly defined eyebrows sit atop a pronounced stop (the sloped area between the forehead and muzzle). The bony structure below the eyes is well chiseled with indistinct cheeks. The muzzle is broad and deep. For proper balance, the distance from the stop to the tip of the nose is one half the distance from the stop up over the crown to the base of the skull.

Nose – The nose should be sized to balance the muzzle and foreface, with well developed nostrils typical of a sporting dog. Animals that are black, black and tan, or black and white should have black noses. In other colors the nose may be brown, liver or black; the darker the better. The color of the nose should harmonize with the eye rim color.

Lips – The upper lip is full and deep enough to cover the lower jaw.

Teeth – Teeth are of proper size, strong and sound; meeting in a scissors bite.

Neck, Topline, Body

Neck – The neck is long enough to allow the nose to reach the ground easily—sniffing the ground is after all an important skill for a hunting dog. The neck is muscular without loose-hanging skin.

Topline – The area that extends from the top of the head to the neck—slopes slightly toward muscular quarters.

Body –The chest is deep with its lowest point being no higher than the elbows. Its front is wide enough for adequate heart and lung space, yet not so wide as to interfere with foreleg movement. Ribs are deep and “well sprung”.

The back is strong, sloping evenly and slightly downward from the shoulders to the on set of the docked tail. The docked tail is set on and carried on a line with the topline of the back, or slightly higher but never straight up or too low. When the dog is in motion the tail is merrily active.

Forequarters

The shoulders should form a nearly 90 degree angle with the upper arm, allowing the dog to easily move his forelegs forward. The shoulders are sharp, sloping without protrusion and set so that the upper points of the withers are at an angle permitting a “wide spring of rib”.

The elbow is directly below the highest point of the shoulder blade when viewed from the side. Strongly boned and muscular forelegs are parallel, straight, and set close to the body. The pasterns (equivalent to human forearms) are short and strong. It is acceptable for the dewclaws to be removed. The large feet are compact, round and firm with “horny pads”; turning neither in nor out.

Hindquarters

When viewed from behind, the hind legs are parallel when in motion and at rest. They are strongly boned and muscled with modest angulation at the stifle (knee) with powerful, clearly defined thighs. The stifle is strong and stable. The hocks (where the lower legs join with the feet) are strong and set low. It is acceptable for the dewclaws to be removed

Coat

The head hair is short and fine as opposed to the body which is medium length and dense to give protection. The Cocker’s ears, chest, abdomen and legs are well feathered without hindering movement or affecting appearance and function. The coat is silky, flat or slightly wavy with a texture that permits easy care. An excessive, curly or cottony textured coat is harshly penalized. Trimming excessive hair to enhance the dog's true lines is permitted but should appear as natural as possible.

Color and Markings

Black Variety – Solid color black, including black with tan points. This should be jet black with no shadings of brown or liver. A small amount of white on the chest and/or throat is allowed; however, white in any other location is disqualified.

Any Solid Color Other than Black (ASCOB) – This is any solid color other than black, ranging from the lightest cream to the darkest red, including brown and brown with tan points. The color should be uniform, but it is permissible for the feathering to be lighter in color. A small amount of white on the chest and/or throat is allowed; however, white in any other location is disqualified.

Parti-Color Variety – This is the combination of two or more solid yet well broken colors, one of which must be white; black and white, red and white (the red may range from lightest cream

to darkest red), brown and white, and roans, plus any such color combination with tan points. It is preferable that the tan markings be located in the same pattern as for the tan points in the Black and ASCOB varieties.

Roans are classified as parti-colors and may be of any of the usual roaning patterns. A primary color of 90% or more is disqualified.

Tan Points – The color of the tan can range from the lightest cream to the darkest red and should be equal to 10% or less of the color of the body. Tan markings in excess of that amount are disqualified.

In the Black or ASCOB variety, the tan points should appear as follows:

1. A clear tan spot over each eye
2. On the sides of the muzzle and on the cheeks
3. On the underside of the ears
4. On all feet and/or legs
5. Under the tail
6. On the chest (optional); the presence or absence is not penalized.

Other Marking Penalties

The following are other penalties that will be levied depending on their presence, or lack thereof:

1. Tan markings that are not readily visible or which amount only to traces are penalized.
2. Tan points that extend upward and join on the top of the muzzle are penalized.
3. The lack of tan markings in the Black or ASCOB variety in any of the specified locations of an otherwise tan-pointed dog is disqualified.

Gait

Despite its small size the Cocker Spaniel possesses the coordinated, smooth and effortless gait that's typical of the sporting dog; driven by strong, powerful rear quarters. He is "properly constructed" in the shoulders and forelegs so that forward reach is not constricted when in a full stride. Good movement requires balance between the front and rear assemblies.

Temperament

The well-bred cocker should be even tempered and without excessive timidity or aggression.

Recognition

The Cocker Spaniel (American and English) is recognized by the following national and/or international breed registry organizations:

- Continental Kennel Club (CKC)
- Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI)
- American Kennel Club (AKC)
- United Kennel Club (UKC)
- Kennel Club of Great Britain (KCGB)
- Canadian Kennel Club (CKC)
- Australian National Kennel Club (ANKC)
- National Kennel Club (NKC)
- New Zealand Kennel Club (NZKC)
- Canadian Canine Registry (CCR)
- American Pet Registry Inc. (APRI)

Breed Standard

(English)

The English Cocker Spaniel shares many of the same breed standards as its American cousin; however, there is sufficient difference to include their breed standard here. This is the AKC standard; check the breed standards of the certifying organization in your host county.

General Appearance

The English Cocker Spaniel is a compactly built, active and merry sporting dog. Vibrant with energy; the Cocker's gait is powerful and smooth, making him equally able to cover ground with little effort or penetrate dense cover to flush and retrieve game. Bred to hunt, his enthusiasm in the field is evident by the incessant action of his tail while at work. The Cocker is, above all, a dog of balance, without exaggeration in any part.

Size and Proportion

Size – The ideal height at the withers (shoulders) for an adult male is 16-17 inches and for an adult female, 15-16 inches. Unlike the American breed which allows a ½ inch variance taller, *any* deviation in height is penalized. The most desirable weight for males is 28 to 34 pounds; females, 26 to 32 pounds, however, proper conformation and substance is more important than weight alone.

Proportion – A properly proportioned Cocker is compactly built and short-coupled, with the height at withers being slightly greater than the distance from the withers to the set-on of the tail.

Head

The head is strong and smooth and is softly contoured without sharp angles. Taken as a whole, the parts combine to produce the expression distinctive of the breed.

Expression – The expression should be soft and “melting,” yet dignified, alert, and intelligent.

Eyes – The eyes are essential to the desired expression. They are medium in size, full and slightly oval; set wide apart; lids tight. The haws (protective eye membrane or third lid) are inconspicuous and may or may not be pigmented. The eye color is dark brown, except in livers and liver parti-colors where hazel is permitted, but a darker hazel is desired.

Ears – The long, flowing ears are a distinctive feature of the Cocker Spaniel and as such, they should be set low. They should be “leather fine and extending to nostrils” with long silky, straight or wavy hair.

Skull – The skull is arched and slightly flattened when viewed from the side or front. In profile, the brow is not noticeably higher than the back of the skull. From above, the lines of the sides of the skull are roughly parallel to those of the muzzle with a definitive but moderate and slightly grooved stop.

Muzzle – The well-cushioned muzzle is the same length as the skull. The jaws are strong so that he may easily carry game. The nostrils are wide for scenting and black in color. While black is still preferred, livers and liver parti-colors and reds and red parti-colors may be brown. The lips are square, not loose-hanging and have inconspicuous flews (the loose flaps of skin on the sides of the upper muzzle).

Bite – The bite should be that of a scissors. A level bite is not preferred. An overshot or undershot bite is severely penalized.

Neck, Topline and Body

Neck – The neck is graceful and muscular of moderate length and in balance with the length and height of the dog. It is arched toward the head, blending cleanly without “throatiness” into sloping shoulders.

Topline – From the top of the head to the neck—blends into the shoulder and backline in a smooth curve. The backline slopes very slightly toward a gently rounded rump with no sagging or “rumpiness”.

Body – The English Cocker has a deep chest that is of proper width to allow free movement of the forelegs without appearing narrow or pinched. The forechest is well developed with a prosternum that projects moderately beyond the shoulder points. The brisket (chest) reaches to the elbow and slopes gradually to a moderate tuck-up. The ribs are “well sprung” and reach gradually to the mid-body, tapering to the back ribs which are of “good depth and extend well back.” The back is short and strong; the loin short, broad and very slightly arched without noticeably affecting the topline. The tail is docked and carried horizontally and is in constant motion while the dog is in action. When excited, the dog may carry his tail somewhat higher, but not cocked up.

Forequarters

The English Cocker has moderate angles. Its shoulders are sloping with a flat blade. The shoulder blade and upper arm are roughly equal in length with the upper arm being set so that it joins the shoulder at an angle that positions the elbow beneath the highest point of the shoulder blade when the dog is standing naturally.

The forelegs are straight with bones nearly uniform in size from elbow to heel. The elbows are set close to the body with semi-flexible nearly straight pasterns. The feet are in proportion to the legs, and are firm, round and catlike; toes arched and tight; pads thick.

Hindquarters

The hindquarters are accentuated by moderate angulation, and most importantly, are in balance with the forequarters. Hips are relatively broad and well rounded. The powerful upper thighs are broad, thick and muscular. The stifle (knee) is strong and well bent. The length from hock (ankle) to pad is short.

Coat

The head hair is short and fine; the body hair is flat or slightly wavy, of medium length and silky in texture. The English Cocker’s coat is well-feathered, but not so much as to interfere with field work. Trimming excessive hair to enhance the dog’s true lines is permitted but should appear as natural as possible.

Color

As with its American cousin, there are a variety of acceptable colors. Parti-colors are clearly marked, ticked or roaned with the white appearing in combinations of black, liver, or shades of red. In parti-colors it is preferable that solid markings be broken on the body and more or less evenly distributed. Absence of body markings is also acceptable.

Solid colors are black, liver or shades of red. White feet on a solid color are undesirable. A little white on the throat is acceptable but in neither case do these white markings make the dog a parti-color. Clearly defined tan markings in a rich shade may appear in conjunction with black,

livers and parti-color combinations of those colors. Black and tans and liver and tans are considered solid colors.

Gait

The English Cocker's gait is characterized more by drive and power than by great speed, making it capable of hunting in dense cover and upland terrain. In the ring, he carries his head proudly and is able to keep much the same topline while in action as when standing. He moves in a straight line without sideways movement or rolling.

Temperament

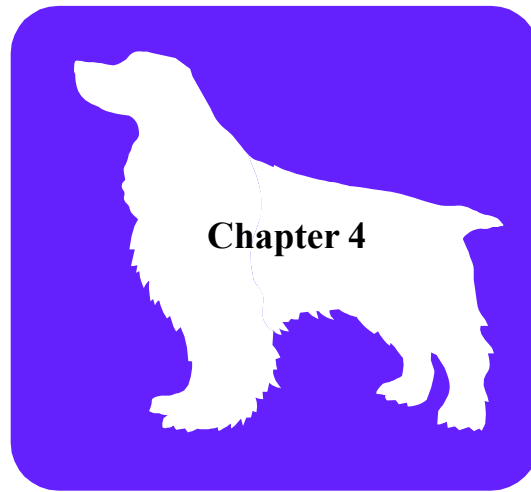
The English Cocker is happy and affectionate with a calm disposition. He is not sluggish or hyperactive, an eager worker and a faithful and charming companion.

Recognition

The Cocker Spaniel (English and American) is recognized by the following national and/or international breed registry organizations:

- Continental Kennel Club (CKC)
- Fédération Cynologique Internationale (FCI)
- American Kennel Club (AKC)
- United Kennel Club (UKC)
- Kennel Club of Great Britain (KCGB)
- Canadian Kennel Club (CKC)
- Australian National Kennel Club (ANKC)
- National Kennel Club (NKC)
- New Zealand Kennel Club (NZKC)
- Canadian Canine Registry (CCR)
- American Pet Registry Inc. (APRI)





Picking the Right Dog

Making the decision to grow your family

The decision to make any dog a part of your family should not be taken lightly. While we don't have much leverage to choose the human members of our family, this is a perfect opportunity to pick one family member we don't mind sharing nightly meals with.

When considering the type of dog to bring home, you must first assess why you want a dog. Is it for companionship for you? For another dog? Is it for protection and security? People often select a particular dog for all the wrong reasons.

Maybe they chose a large breed because they wanted something that looked impressive and imposing—without giving consideration to the food budget or required living space. Maybe they chose a small dog thinking it would fit their small apartment but didn't consider that the little tike might not appreciate sitting in a 23rd story window all day and as a result showed his disdain by eating a favorite pair of shoes and using your potted fern to relieve himself.

Or worse yet, perhaps they gave the decision no thought at all and simply picked the cutest, most outgoing of the bunch. Now of course you can make hasty decisions and still wind up with an absolutely great dog, but it never hurts to increase your odds with just a bit of planning.

First, you have to determine if you have the time, space, budget and lifestyle necessary to train and cohabitate with a dog. Not every lifestyle or living situation is beneficial to a dog and the cocker in particular may require more attention than you can spare.

When assessing your desires, be honest with yourself and think about your lifestyle and the needs of the cocker or any other breed you may be considering. In the long run, it will work out best for both of you.

The Cocker Spaniel's history as a hunting dog makes him a naturally stable companion. It also means he has the innate need to remain in peak physical condition. Underneath all that dense hair is a muscular body that needs to be exercised regularly. On the other hand, the Cocker's small size makes it adaptable to most any living environment as long as there is ample room to play.

Considerations Specific to the Cocker Spaniel

Before you buy, consider the following:

1. Owning a dog is a lifetime commitment—the dog's life, not yours. A well-kept Cocker can live for 12 or more years.
2. Although intelligent, the Cocker Spaniel needs diligent training and patience. The training regimen must be strict but with gentle admonition.
3. Weekly, if not daily grooming is necessary to keep the long, dense hair tangle-free. And the more time spent outside running through woods, the more grooming will be required.
4. The Cocker Spaniel requires regular exercise. If you don't have a fence yard in which she can roam and sniff freely you'll need to take her for regular walks.
5. Regular living and unexpected expenses such as food bowls, vaccinations, licensing fees and emergency vet visits can add up.

You've made it to this point without being daunted and you're still certain that the Cocker Spaniel is right for you. Congratulations! But your decisions aren't complete just yet. Now you must consider more specifics and decide whether you want a puppy or adult dog; male or female.

Puppy or Adult

There is no greater joy to the dog lover than bringing home a fuzzy, fragile little ball of fluff and boundless energy. Unless of course you don't enjoy bathroom accidents, early morning or late night walks and chewed possessions.

Raising your pet from a puppy doesn't have to be hard, but it won't always be easy either. If this is your first adventure with a puppy, you're bound to make mistakes but at least you and your puppy will be making mistakes and learning together. The day will come when you can proudly display both your training and your dog's learning skills to fetch, sit, and stay.

Cocker Spaniel puppies are playful, smart and adventurous. If you make training sessions fun, the Cocker is likely to learn better and enjoy the process. You'll learn more about training later in the Training chapter.

Puppies can also be an advantage over older dogs if you have children. In one sense they will "grow up together," forming strong bonds. It's also an opportunity to teach children responsibility and how to properly handle and care for a puppy to an adult dog.

The type of adult dog your puppy becomes is a reflection of your time spent training them as a puppy. Hence, it benefits you both to be diligent.

Choosing an Adult Dog

Whether it's because of time constraints on training or just because you know it's harder to place older dogs and you want to be benevolent, let's assume you've decided to adopt an older dog.

This can be a marvelous time-saver if your dog is already housebroken and fairly well behaved. On the other hand it can be a nightmare, or at the very least, difficult to handle if the animal has ingrained bad habits that need to be broken. Adult dogs with troubled backgrounds need more patience and understanding but don't let this deter you; because they often make the most loyal and protective pets once they know they've finally found a long-term home with a top-notch human. At any rate, most dogs are able to adjust to a new home and owner within a matter of days. Adapting to other dogs—and other dogs to the new one—may take slightly longer.

Male or Female

If your purpose for getting a Cocker Spaniel is strictly as a pet, the matter of which sex to pick is more one of personal preference or of no preference at all. It's possible that if you're introducing a new puppy to a home with an existing dog, getting one of the opposite gender might make for an easier integration. Physically of course females are slightly smaller.

Let's first dispel some myths. Male dogs are not the only ones that 'hump' or mark territory. Humping other dogs or human legs is actually a sign of dominance, not just a sexual behavior. She may also lift her leg when peeing. So if you have a dominant female, don't be surprised if you see these behaviors upon occasion.

As with humans, females tend to be more sedate and upon occasion may be more affectionate and sensitive. Males are often more independent.

If you intend to breed your Cocker, then the choice of sex takes on more importance. If your goal is to become a breeder, you would most likely want to start with a female so that you can obtain your own stock (it is customary that the female owner keeps the puppies, paying the male owner a stud fee and/or choice of puppy). If you only wish to collect stud fees, then you'd obviously want a male. The unspayed female will go into 'season' twice a year, making a mess around the house with bloody discharge, plus she'll be more moody or dare I say 'bitchy'.

If you don't intend to breed or show your dog, you should have it spayed or neutered. Note that neutered dogs are disqualified from shows but can still compete in field and obedience trials. Spaying or neutering reduces the risk of your Cocker contracting cancerous tumors and other gender-specific ailments such as ovarian cysts or false pregnancies in females.

The following chart summarizes some generalities in gender differences and is based largely on theory. These are not cut and dry rules and most longtime dog owners and breeders will tell you that other than physical differences, the exact opposite seems true.

Female	Male
Smaller	Larger
Less dominant	More dominant
More likely to be homebodies	Likely to roam
Less prone to fight	More likely to fight
Moody & sensitive to human emotions	Less moody
Will go into heat and are slightly more expensive to neuter	Do not go into heat (they react to unspayed females)
More compliant	More defiant

Breeder Cindy Hall of CM Cocker Pups has the following additional observations specific to the Cocker. “I have found that the males are much more affectionate and loving. They are more outgoing and sure of themselves always showing a sense of confidence,” she says. She also believes that males show little moodiness and are less prone to emotional swings. “A male dog is always eager to please his owner, he takes very quickly to children and is more accepting of other pets,” she says.

Her years of experience in observing male and females have led her to believe that females can be emotional and sulky if they don’t get their way. The female will be playful as a puppy she says but tends to sit back and watch as she gets older, while the males remain playful even in their elder years. “The males love to be in the center of the action and become a huge part of the family.” “The female is also the queen,” Hall continues, “she is the boss, she can have mood swings where one minute she is just as sweet [and] can be right in the middle of all of the action and the next minute a little grumpy and wanting to be alone,” she concludes.

Regardless of which sex you choose, having your Cocker spayed or neutered will help reduce or eliminate bad behaviors and reduce the risk for certain gender-specific health ailments.

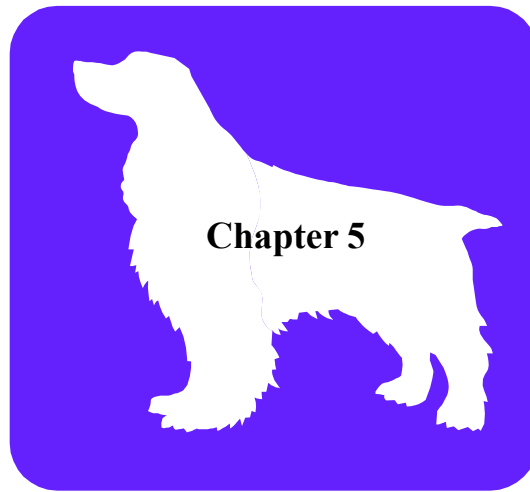
Choosing a Show Dog

If your desire is to enter the howling world of show business then of course you want to find the finest specimen available. You can get a show level Cocker Spaniel in one two ways.

1. You can start with a pedigreed puppy and train and raise it on your own.
2. You can purchase an experienced, mature show dog.

The first option is the least expensive up-front but there are no guarantees that your pup won’t have some latent ailment that will end its show career before it ever starts. While you may pay dearly for a mature show dog, you are at least purchasing the assurance that the dog is of proper show quality.





Buying Your Cocker Spaniel

Where to Find Your Cocker Spaniel

If you're looking to bring home a puppy, of course you want a cute, happy, fun, friend. But you also want to make sure that your new puppy is as healthy as possible. You should avoid buying your puppy from a puppy mill or mall pet store which usually gets their dogs from these mills. Because of puppy mills, most mega-sized pet stores like PetSmart and PetCo will not sell dogs but they do host adoption events.

A puppy mill exists only to produce as many dogs as possible to meet public demand and stuff the wallets of greedy ill-intentioned breeders. Their breeding practices are questionable and they are seldom concerned with pedigree or inherent health issues. Even if you're not concerned with pedigree from a show or breed registration viewpoint—after all mutts need love too—you still want a puppy that's conceived and reared in a healthy environment.

As mentioned earlier, the goal of every reputable breeder is to meet the AKC, Kennel Club, or similar standards. This won't preclude with 100 percent certainty the potential for problems but it will greatly increase your chances of finding a well cared for, properly socialized, healthy animal. This is because reputable breeders will not intentionally breed dogs with known ailments or defects.

How your puppy turns out begins at conception and is based on the knowledge and skill of the breeder. From selecting the parents to raising the puppies to the age at which you find them and want to take one home, the breeder sets the foundation for your puppy's future; you will complete the building process once you get him home.

To locate a reliable Cocker Spaniel breeder in your area check with the AKC and the ASC in the United States, the CKC in Canada and the Kennel Club in England.

Investigate the Breeders

Because this is a decision you'll have to live with for the next dozen or so years, it's worth doing a bit of homework up-front. Assuming you've decided to shop with a breeder and you've compiled your list of trusted sources, you should now schedule appointments to visit and inspect the facilities.

Don't balk at this idea, too many people take more time shopping for a sofa than they do a pet and it only leads to misery for everyone. You want to make sure the breeder isn't a "backyard breeder", the canine equivalent of a "shade tree mechanic".

When visiting the breeder, take note of the dogs and the conditions in which they live. The facility as a whole should be spacious and clean.

Ask questions. Ask if they are members of breed clubs, specialty clubs or obedience clubs. Affiliation with a club means you can check their references to make sure they don't run a puppy mill.

Inquire as to whether the dogs have been cleared of eye diseases, hip dysplasia and other inherent conditions. There is more information on common Cocker Spaniel ailments in the chapter on Health Concerns.

Beware of "Private Sellers"

If you are shopping diligently you are sure to come across someone offering puppies for sale as a private individual. Frankly, if they have a female dog that has just given birth to a litter of pups, they are a breeder. One litter is all it takes to make a breeder of anyone.

So, with that in mind, what you should ask yourself is; did the breeder of this pup produce this litter responsibly or irresponsibly? Did she have the right knowledge or not? Did she practice due diligence in selecting healthy parents? If the seller of your pup insists she's not a breeder, politely walk away and find one with more awareness and character.

Dos and Don'ts of Selecting a Proper Breeder

Here we offer a list of Dos and Don'ts for guidance on what to look for and what to avoid when visiting breeders.

DO...find a breeder that limits their stock to one or two breeds

DON'T...select a breeder with more than two breeds as their focus is most likely more on selling puppies for high profit than on quality of any specific breed.

DO...make sure they breed the female no more than once per year

DON'T...select a breeder that has more than a few litters per year, even when there are multiple females.

DO...welcome questions about your lifestyle, any existing pets and expectations of the new dog; it means the breeder is interested in the conditions of the Cocker's new home and wants to ensure you're a good match for each other.

DON'T...select a breeder who seems to have no concern for the pup's new home.

DO...select a breeder that performs genetic testing on the parents.

DON'T...fall for the line that genetic testing is unreliable, unproven or any other excuse that indicates the breeder does not support testing.

Assessing the Skill and Knowledge of a Breeder

Since the goal of every reputable breeder is to foster litters that meet or beat the minimum AKC or other recognized standard, it would seem logical that their knowledge and skill at breeding will have a huge bearing on the rearing of the puppy and what type of adult he becomes. You must remember that the puppies your breeder has are not the same as those owned by other breeders.

Your breeder must know the traits and qualities of the breed, which is why you don't want a breeder who dabbles in too many different breeds. In her interactions with you, she should be able to help match you with a pup based on your temperament and lifestyle. This is why you should not mind the questions posted in the "Breeders Questions" section to follow. Ask your breeder why she chose to breed this particular type of dog. If the answer is well-conceived such as, "I was impressed by its character and temperament," this is a sign of someone you can trust. But if she gives you vague or vain answers like, "I like the way they look," or "Because they bring in good money", then you should probably move on.

Track Record

As in any profession, one's track record is a good indicator of a person's ability and dedication. If you find your breeder by trusted referral, you're already ahead of the game but you will still want to know about the breeder's credentials. They won't have a PhD in dog breeding, but the quality of their skill, knowledge and experience should equal a successful track record.

Even though your breeder should not have more than one litter per year from a single female, you want them to have an overall record of at least four litters. This is because the AKC requires breeding of at least four litters in order to qualify for licensing.

Some breeders will specialize in bringing out certain breed characteristics. So, if you want a dog for obedience, go to a breeder who has been successful in producing this kind of dog. Similarly, if you want one for conformation, go to a breeder who specializes in this. Of course, just as you may want a combination of these two, you will find breeders who combine both talents successfully.

A breeder that also shows her dogs in conformation shows or obedience trials is unafraid of "proofing her progeny," so this would be a very good indicator that the breeder has good stock. You probably wouldn't feel too comfortable buying a car from someone whose never driven; not

having that experience would make you wonder how qualified they are to talk about the benefits of horsepower, torque, or gas mileage.

Hence, a breeder who shows her dogs is putting her money where her mouth is. Keep in mind, however, that just because a breeder does not show, shouldn't count them out either. Ask whether or not she currently shows, or has ever done so and if you're comfortable with the answer, and all other indications of a good breeder are present, you're probably still dealing with a fine breeder.

Questions to Ask a Breeder

Even with a trusted referral, good breeders can be difficult to find. Don't fall for glitzy ads in big name magazines just because they're glitzy.

Irresponsible and ignorant breeders are more than a dime a dozen, and since they work from a standpoint of ignorance, rather than breeding healthy, well-adjusted pups, they breed a whole lot of health and temperament problems. Recognize the bad ones and get out quick. When you've found a breeder worthy of your time, you'll want to spend some time asking the important questions. A good breeder won't mind; if she gets testy, you have to wonder why.

Some questions to ask include:

- How long have you been breeding puppies?
- How long with this specific breed?
- Do you have a few references I can contact? A good and committed breeder should be able to give you several references.
- Can I get a written guarantee? What exactly is covered in the guarantee? All good breeders give a written guarantee against congenital or hereditary defects for at least the first year, sometimes two. The guarantee your breeder gives you should ideally be for a refund or a replacement puppy. The guarantee is an indication of the breeder's ethics and confidence in her litter.
- Do both parents of these pups belong to you? May I see both of them? Use your best judgment on this one. Just because both parents are on-site doesn't mean it's good thing, the breeder could just be operating a puppy farm and it's easier to get away with when you have your own stud. However, if you are able to see both parents you'll get an idea of your pup's temperament and size.
- Do your Cocker's have any health issues? Sometimes, pups develop congenital or hereditary problems. If they are born to parents who are ill, their immunity is that much vastly reduced against life threatening illnesses. There is more information on what ailments to watch out for in the "Selecting a Healthy Puppy" section below.
- Where do you raise your pups? Of course, you will see the environment in which they are raised when you visit but this is a good question if you're just speaking on the phone first.

- Where do you keep your adult dogs? If your breeder keeps his adult dogs in kennels away from the normal daily routines of a home, he will not be in a position to speak about their true personality, temperament and health.
- Would you recommend I spay or neuter? If you're with a good breeder, he will want to educate you on the advantages of spaying and neutering your pup.
- Can I see pictures of some of your other pups/litters? It will be helpful to see exactly what the breeder calls a good dog.
- What average size do your puppies grow up to be? The breeder should be able to answer this one confidently.
- Do you dock your pups' tails and remove the dewclaws? If no, why not? The dewclaw is a now useless nail above the foot on the inside of the leg. If it is not removed or trimmed it can get snagged and cause pain, perhaps leading to emergency surgery. Usually, the tails and dews are done when your pup is around three days old.

Steer clear of those breeders who do not dock or remove dews. They may tell you they don't think it necessary to put the animal through any unnecessary pain, but most likely they don't want to pay the vet for this job.

- How many breeds or mixed breeds do you normally breed? If she has a line-up of different breed dogs in kennels, you know immediately she is not an expert on any of them. Time and dedication to one or just a couple of breeds are required to be truly well-versed in that breed and their only in the business to make money.

A responsible breeder truly cares about the future home of her litter. Until she can place her pups in good, caring homes, she will continue to be responsible for the litter's medical and sanitary care and socialization. So, to protect her own investment—emotional and financial—she will question any prospective buyers very closely to gauge if they are really capable of looking after this precious pup.

A Breeder's Questions for You

You can expect to hear the following or similar questions; it's not just idle chatter, it's an interview. They don't want the puppy coming back as much as you don't want to have to take it back, at least not for reasons that could be avoided.

- Have you owned a dog before this? If so, which breed was it?
- How long did you have it?
- Do you have little children? How many? How old are they?
- Do you live in a house or apartment? If an apartment, are dogs allowed in the building?
- Do you have other pets too?
- Is your yard fenced?
- Do you exercise? Does this involve brisk walks or trips to the gym?

- How often do you exercise and for how long?
- Do you plan to give your pup obedience training?
- Do you know how much it costs to maintain a Cocker? This includes veterinary care, including spaying and neutering, purchasing a good quality dog food, boarding the dog when you are away, annual license fees, etc.
- Are you aware that taking in a puppy means taking on the responsibility of another living creature that will be dependent upon you?

Answer these questions positively, honestly and to the best of your ability. A 'No' from you doesn't knock you out as a potential owner; it just gives the breeder enough information to provide you with additional advice or resources.

Selecting a Healthy Puppy

Puppies become socialized from birth to about 16 weeks of age. You should adopt your Cocker Spaniel beginning at age seven to eight weeks. Convention has it that puppies can be adopted starting at six weeks after weaning, but frankly, they're still forming their personalities up to seven weeks so you may wish to wait another week or two to allow them to complete formation of basic social skills. This additional two weeks of patience can make the difference between gentle hand play and late night trips to the hospital with puncture wounds because Fluffy didn't learn how not to bite so hard.



For a better chance in selecting a healthy puppy, here are a few general things to look for as you wander through the litter.

1. Make sure that all puppies in the litter are healthy with smooth and shiny coats. Part the hair and look for signs of fleas or ticks. Even if you don't see the actual parasite, black pepper spots are a sign of fleas.
2. Check the eyes and ears for any sign of running or discharge, they should be bright and clear. The pups should not have tearstains (that brownish buildup) down the face.
3. A wet nose is a healthy nose, although a dry nose doesn't necessarily spell doom.
4. Ensure the teeth are white; gums appear healthy with no bleeding. Unless a breed requires it, the bite should be neither under or overshot.

5. Ears should not have discharge or odor. Beware of puppies that shake their heads or scratch their ears, this could be a sign of ear mites.
6. The Cocker puppy should demonstrate the muscular, compact characteristics of his breed.
7. Check that the temperament is friendly, alert, eager and curious.
8. Skip the pup that exhibits aggression or excessive shyness.

Purchase Contract

As with any major purchase you can expect to receive a sales contract that outlines the obligations between the breeder and you regarding your puppy. It defines what's expected of you as the new owner to care for the puppy.

In the case of a "pet- or companion-quality" puppy you simply agree to have the Cocker spayed or neutered. You may also be required to tell the breeder if you can no longer keep and care for your pet. The breeder in turn guarantees the health of the puppy and his temperament; clearly defining how that temperament is determined. There should also be a clause providing a refund or replacement if either the health or temperament fails to live up to the contract.

In the case of a dog purchased to show or breed, you will obviously not have the spay/neuter clause. However, don't be surprised if the breeder does not turn over full ownership of the Cocker to you. How can this be when you're paying a premium to obtain a show dog, you might understandably wonder?

Well, the breeder's reputation is on the line so she wants to have a say in how and when her progeny is represented. Frankly, if you've never shown before this can be an amazing value to have an experienced, professional partner already in the business. That's akin to having Donald Trump help you manage your first investment property (almost); how cool would that be!

Registration Application

You can also expect to receive papers to register your purebred with the AKC or other appropriate organization. The puppy may already be registered by name which many breeders do to ensure that their kennel name is part of the dog's official name. The breeder will give you the form to add your name as buyer/owner and mail to the AKC (or CKC or Kennel Club, etc.). If the name is not already registered the name field should be blank and you are free to name your puppy as you wish.

Registration only has value if you intend to breed or show your Cocker. Otherwise, it does not benefit you or your puppy except for some bragging rights.

An important footnote from the AKC: just because you purchase a puppy that qualifies for AKC registration, does not mean you are getting a high quality Cocker. The AKC specifically states that "AKC" and quality are NOT one and the same. The AKC is a registry body and a

registration certificate merely identifies the dog as the offspring of a known sire and dam, born on a known date. It in no way indicates or validates the quality or state of health of the puppy.

They conclude that “‘show quality’ is determined by many factors including the dog's health, physical condition, ability to move and appearance. Breeders breeding show stock are trying to produce animals that closely resemble the description of perfection described in the breed standard. Many people breed their dogs with no concern for the qualitative demands of the breed standard. When this occurs repeatedly over several generations, the animals, while still purebred, can be of extremely low quality.”

The basic fee is \$15 for AKC registration with additional registration packages and products available. The Kennel Club of England is £10 and in Canada, the CKC registration fee is between \$16 and \$64 CAD, depending on the age of the puppy at the time of application and your membership status.

Pedigree

If you've found a puppy that appeals to you, you should next check the pedigree. A pedigree is the written record of the dog's recent ancestry and includes notes on any show champions in its lineage. A long history of champions is impressive; however you should pay closest attention to the two or three generations immediately preceding your puppy. If you won't show your dog this aspect may not carry as much importance as the other areas but you should still pay attention to the paperwork, especially since you'll be outlaying plenty of cash for the privilege of pedigree.

Health Records

The breeder will provide a number of health documents indicating the health status of each pup. Don't ever accept a breeder's word for your dog's health without documentation. One document is the written record of the puppy's vaccinations (health record) for your vet. This document will show the date of puppy shots and worming. These shots are often given by the breeder herself, this is standard practice. When you do receive a health certificate, read it carefully and ensure that the sire and dam (father and mother) names on the registration papers exactly match the names on the health document.

Health Certificates

Health certificates are given to officially clear (or confirm) the presence of a genetic disorder. Remember that genetic testing is done on the parents of the puppies you are considering, not the puppies themselves. There are several standard tests administered to most all breeds that detect genetic deficiencies. However, there are a few tests that Cocker Spaniels in particular should be checked for.

Both the American and English Cocker Spaniel are predisposed to hip and eye problems. In addition, the American is known to have knee problems and the English hearing problems. The breeder's veterinarian sends x-rays or other required tests and documents to one of four official rating boards, which then issues a clearance certificate, or denies one when necessary.

Unless indicated, these certifying boards apply to the US. Outside of the US there may be different certifying boards, check with the breed registration group in your host country for guidance.

Genetic Tests for Your Cocker Spaniel

American & English

OFA (Hips) – Hip dysplasia is a common ailment in many purebreds where the ball of the hip does not fit into the socket. This can cause the animal moderate to severe pain, varying degrees of lameness, or at the very least, arthritis. This condition is not present in puppyhood but develops over time and is noticeable somewhere between five and 12 months of age.

The theories on the cause of hip dysplasia are as varied as the breeds that suffer from this ailment. The most common theory is that hip dysplasia is strictly a genetic disorder. Others believe it comes from poor nutrition and vitamin C deficiency, or excessive protein intake from puppy food that causes rapid growth. The following four agencies issue hip clearance certificates.

Hip Dysplasia Rating Centers

OFA – The Orthopedic Foundation for Animals

PennHIP – University of Pennsylvania Hip Improvement Program

GDC – Institute for Genetic Disease Control in Animals

OVC – Ontario Veterinary College (Canada)

While hip dysplasia is prevalent in many breeds, the Cocker is particularly predisposed to this ailment. Pre-testing of the Cocker Spaniel parents is essential. There's no guarantee of course your Cocker won't develop this ailment but having a clearance certificate improves the pup's chances.

CERF (Eyes) – Some eye diseases such as retinal dysplasia, juvenile cataracts, or progressive retinal atrophy (PRA) can lead to blindness in many breeds. To receive clearance for CERF, the parents' eyes must be examined by an American College of Veterinary medicine board-certified ophthalmologist. Once the breeder receives the exam results, she sends them to the Canine Eye Registration Foundation (CERF) for evaluation, and hopefully an official clearance certificate.

It's important to note that CERF certificates are only valid for one year because some eye disorders crop up at different stages in the life cycle. So be sure to check the date on the certificate the breeder provides.

American Only

Patella (Knees) – Luxating patella is a condition where the kneecap can 'travel' and dislocate from its socket. Although most common in small breeds, the American Cocker

is at particular risk for this ailment. Unlike CERF, there is not currently an official body providing clearance but the puppy's parents should be examined and cleared by the breeder's vet. The breeder should provide written confirmation from the vet.

English Only

BAER (Hearing) – Unlike the other genetic tests, this one is to be performed on the puppy itself starting at about six weeks of age, not on the parents. BAER stands for Brainstem Auditory Evoked Response and works by detecting electrical activity in the cochlea and auditory pathways in the brain; much like an antenna detects radio or TV signals. The response waveform consists of a series of peaks. The response from an ear that is deaf is essentially a flat line. This test isn't available everywhere and it's not required so as of this writing, it's optional and there is no official clearance certificate.

Temperament

In addition to the obvious health tests, another aspect of a healthy and well-balanced puppy is its temperament. It is a good idea to select a puppy whose temperament fits your own, this will allow easier integration into your existing lifestyle without changing it to the extreme.

For example, while observing the puppies you'll be able to see which ones are low key and which ones are bold. If you live an active lifestyle, the bolder pup might be best for you but if you lead a quieter lifestyle, you may be better off with the calmer personality.

You can also gauge the puppy's temperament by observing the mother. The mother should appear friendly with her master (the breeder) and show no signs of fear of people.

Puppy Tests

You can perform any or all of these simple tests on a puppy to help determine their level of socialization and temperament. If possible, these should be performed on individual puppies away from the distraction of the litter.

Flip Test

Dr. Michael W. Smith of Evans Mill Animal Hospital in Lithonia, GA (US) suggests picking up the puppy and holding it in your arms, with puppy lying on its back.

What it means: *This is an unnatural position but if it does not squirm excessively to change position it is indicative of a calm and trusting personality when restrained.*

Pickup Test

Pick the puppy up and hold him in your arms. Firmly stroke his head and shoulders. This is an area of dominance so an ideal personality will allow this stroking without much objection. A dominant puppy will growl or try to jump out of your grasp.

***What it means:** Shows whether a dog accepts social domination. One that does will be easier to manage.*

Cradle Test

Lift the puppy off the floor with your hands cradling the puppy's stomach. The ideal puppy will squirm a bit then calm down. A dominant one will bark, wiggle and otherwise try to get away.

***What it means:** Shows the reaction of a puppy with you in total control.*

Clap Test

Pet the puppy without picking him up, speak warmly to him. Then bend down and clap your hands and wait. The ideal pup will be curious and happily come to you. A dominant pup will have the disdain of a cat and dismiss your presence.

***What it means:** Shows level of curiosity and willingness to receive human affection.*

Follow Test

Pet the puppy for a few moments then walk away. Does he follow you? If so he should keep a proper distance. One that gets underfoot or tries to nip at you is showing signs of dominance.

***What it means:** Shows level of curiosity and willingness to receive human affection.*

Mind you, having a dominant dog doesn't have to be a bad thing, you just may have to work harder at obedience and other training. It also depends on whether this is the only dog in your home, whether you have children or other animals in your home. These tests aren't meant to eliminate your taking a dominant dog home, but just to help you know what you might be in for when you get there.

Alternate Sources for Finding Your Cocker Spaniel

The Shelter

Another source for finding a fine Cocker Spaniel is your local animal shelter or breed rescue organization. There are many no-kill facilities that save homeless dogs from euthanasia and sell them for a mere fraction of the cost of a dog from a breeder or store.

The shelter may or may not have mixed-breed or purebred Cockers at any given time as they service all animals in need. Plus, the minor cost (about \$90 US) usually covers initial shots, spaying or neutering and often microchipping to identify the dog as yours in case he's ever lost.

Rescue Groups

You can turn to a Cocker Spaniel rescue group that works to find homes specifically for this breed. These groups often have contracts or other types of regulations setting a standard for adoption because it is their goal to find stable, loving homes for these animals in order to keep them from coming back into the system.

Your chances of a shelter or rescue Cocker having health issues shouldn't be much riskier than dealing with a breeder. It may even be better odds as most of these facilities have time to observe the animals in their care, plus they have veterinarians on staff or as volunteers. They will advise if a dog has special needs.

A Word About Adopted Dogs

You should not fear adopting a dog from a shelter or rescue group. Simply do your homework as you would for a breeder, taking note of the living conditions and the attitudes of the people that work there. A gloomy facility doesn't necessarily mean bad dogs but it is an indication of the care they receive.

Most people who adopt from shelters find that these dogs show a deep sense of gratitude and attachment to their new owners (you). This attachment is often stronger than the bonds formed when raised in your home from puppyhood.

A tip for selecting puppies from a shelter is to place your hand to the cage of one you fancy. An emotionally well-balanced pup will come to sniff and say hello. Caged dogs should gravitate to human contact because they are deprived of it.

The Cost of Owning a Cocker Spaniel

There are a number of costs associated with buying and caring for a dog. Of course there are the obvious upfront costs to purchase, but then there are the costs of feeding, housing, training, vaccinating and just as with having a child, unexpected expenses resulting from emergencies or other events.

Cost to Purchase

Purebreds

AKC purebred Cocker Spaniel puppies can run anywhere between \$350 and \$650 US depending on the area and market conditions. In the UK prices range from £300 to £550 and in Canada, from \$400 to \$750 CAD.

Those with extensive champion bloodlines can run around \$1,000 US (£900, \$1200 CAD) or even higher. If you want to show your dog, you will most likely have to take this route.

It sounds like a lot but you must remember that the expense is comprised of the breeder's skill and knowledge in creating the perfect breed specimen. Buy cheap, get cheap.

Rescues

Rescue adoptions vary widely but run on average between \$175 and \$250 US. These are usually small, independent, sometimes home-based organizations that specialize in homing one breed. Their financial resources are limited and so must charge more per adoption than a large shelter, but their breed-specific knowledge base can prove useful.

Shelters

By far, shelters are the most economical option. Because shelters or humane societies service most any animal in need, they have a broader appeal to financial supporters and volunteers, and are able to offer lower cost adoptions. They are usually private, non-government supported charities and differ from the government animal control centers that kill animals after only a few days on site.

The average cost of a shelter dog is between \$85 and \$110 US, which includes some initial vaccinations, spaying or neutering and oftentimes microchipping to identify your dog in case he's lost or stolen. The cost can vary from one county or region to another within the same state so if initial cash outlay is a concern, check several shelters in your area.

Many shelters offer low-cost spaying or neuter certificates that are accepted by local veterinarians to help offset the cost and reduce overpopulation.

A Warning About Price Differences

Treat your Cocker Spaniel shopping as though you were buying your dream car. Compare the dealer, the color, and the price, but beware of dealer options. Some breeders will try to overprice the pups just because they can. They may make claims that their puppies are somehow better or are more adept at field trials. Frankly, if you're not going in the field with your Cocker—assuming their claim is even true—field-trained dogs don't necessarily make good pets because they'll want to be in the field working, not hanging around your house waiting to bark at the mailman.

On the other hand, an under priced dog should send up the “too-good-to-be-true” flag. Perhaps the breeder is taking shortcuts and not doing due diligence with genetic testing, or is knowingly selling puppies with a history of health or behavioral problems.

So, as with any car salesman, take everything with a grain of salt, don't make anxious decisions and don't stray from your game plan. However, unlike buying a car, haggling over the price isn't part of the buying experience. This can be an insult to the breeder, if you don't like the price find another place to buy your dog.

Gender Pricing

Some breeders will often price females higher than males. The question is, why? Is the female of more value? This makes little sense when the pups are from the same litter. The price of each Cocker should be determined by the litter characteristics and quality, not individual gender.

General Expenses

Food

The cost of food will vary slightly depending on your particular pet's appetite and the brand of choice. On average, you can expect to spend between \$30 and \$50 US per month.

The Vet

Your Cocker Spaniel will require annual immunizations and checkups. And, while you hope it won't happen, there may be the need for emergency visits and other unexpected medical expenses.

A series of core vaccinations (rabies, parvo, distemper, adenovirus-2) will run about \$124 to \$140 US, or more. Treatment at an emergency facility will run about \$100 US on average, JUST FOR WALKING IN. The course of treatment will carry its own additional fees.

The AMVA recommends that these optional or “non-core” vaccinations be administered based on your dog's individual needs: Bordatella (kennel cough), Leptospirosis, Lyme Disease and Parainfluenza.

Adenovirus-1, Coronavirus and Giardia are not recommended at all. And controversially, Bordatella is also not recommended in most cases. It is proven to not only be ineffective against kennel cough (an upper-respiratory disease), it can even cause it. But you may have a hard time finding a vet that will agree not to give it. Many vets require the shot for overnight stays, as do dog parks and other places where multiple dogs may be present. Ultimately, you have to decide if you want your dog to have this vaccination, or pass on places that require it.

NOTE: As of 2003 the American Veterinary Medical Association (AMVA) recommends the core vaccinations be administered every three years instead of annually. The vaccines for parvo, distemper and adenovirus are shown to last for seven years. Rabies, which is required by law, lasts three years.

There are companies that offer veterinary pet insurance (VPI), which operates like health insurance for people only better because you have the flexibility of using any licensed vet of your choosing. Rates run from \$99 US per year for a basic plan to \$240 US for a full-coverage plan with petinsurance.com, the largest pet insurance provider in the United States.

As with human health insurance, there are optional coverages available for additional cost. The reasonable cost may well be worth the peace of mind, especially if you find yourself in the unfortunate position of owning a chronically ill dog.

Miscellaneous Expenses

You may also have a very small fee—usually less than \$5 US for a spayed or neutered pet, slightly higher for a non-altered one—to register your Cocker Spaniel with the county or town in which you live. Your vet should provide the registration forms, if required.

There will be other expenses for setting up home as discussed in the next chapter but these costs are completely dependent on your tastes and how you choose to house and spoil your Cocker.





Making a Home

Making a Place for Your Cocker Spaniel

Your Cocker Spaniel will need a place to call his own. If your Cocker is to be a house dog, you'll need to establish separate sleeping and dining areas that afford the dog a comfortable, secure space while accommodating his human roommate's lifestyle.

You wouldn't invite a family member to stay in your home without being prepared. You might have fresh sheets on a fine guest bed with fluffed pillows, plush bathroom towels, a TV with remote control, a pantry stocked with favorite foods and maybe even a special item selected just for them. Anything less and you'll be the unsavory talk of many family dinners.

Well, you need to make the same preparations for your new four-legged family member, TV not necessary. Whether you decide to have an indoor dog or an outdoor dog, you'll need to outfit your home with a few basic necessities to accommodate either living situation.

Prepping for Pup

Make no bones about it (pun intended), the first week or so will be tough, especially if you've never parented a dog before. It's a good idea to bring your puppy home when you can spend the most time with him; not running to work early in the morning and coming in late. Long weekends, holidays and vacation days are great times to start your life together.

- Pre-select the potty spot. If you have easy access to a yard then this will be a patch away from foot traffic. If you're in an apartment, you will want to use papers, or "wee-wee pads" made especially for this purpose.

- When you arrive at the breeder (or wherever) to pick up your new pooch, find out what type of food the litter is accustomed to eating and at what time. Ask for a few days' supply.

Puppy-Proofing

This little Cocker is your new baby. And as with all babies that begin to explore as they grow, you want to take some precautionary measures and puppy-proof areas of the house for safety. Depending on the size of your home you may proof all of it or just rooms where you expect your puppy to spend the most time.

The kitchen is a logical choice for its general use as the heart of the home and because it's usually easy to clean. The den may also be a good choice but ultimately the decision depends on your personal lifestyle. The garage or basement is *never* a good choice as they only serve to isolate the dog from his family. Putting a dog in one of these unfriendly places is for human convenience; where's the pleasure of having a puppy in your home only to banish him to a cold, impersonal garage? If this is the only place you can provide a dog, please consider another pet.

Puppy-proofing simply entails removing items from reach that you don't want to be played with or chewed. Tie up or tuck away curtain and blind cords, electric cords, and anything else that a puppy could chew or become tangled in. If you cannot sufficiently hide wires, treat them with Bitter Apple to make them unpalatable. The cream is best on wires because it's not as messy, the spray can be used on solid surfaces. Bitter Apple leaves an unpleasant but harmless taste. (It can also be used on your dog's coat to discourage licking wounds and hot-spots, so they have a chance to properly heal.)

You should also remove all shoes and clothing from the floor, as well as tuck away handheld phones and remote controls in drawers. Take a critical birds-eye view (or puppy view) of your home and simply pick up items that a puppy or nervous adult might find enticing.

Ground Rules

If you live with other people, you should lay some ground rules that everyone agrees to uphold, otherwise you'll raise a confused and troublesome pup. If the puppy is to receive no food scraps, or be allowed on furniture, or on beds, then all household members should enforce the rules. That's not to say that your clever pup won't stretch out on the sofa in your absence, but he will at least learn not to do it when you're around. Other guidelines include:

- Don't allow rough play with puppies—or adults for that matter. Puppies are fragile and need to be handled with care. Adults may react unpredictably; wait until he is well settled and you've learned about his personality before you invite rough play.
- Do not give meat bones to puppies under six months of age as it may pose a choking hazard or damage milk teeth.

- This may seem like a no-brainer, but people do it. Don't place your puppy in unnatural heights like on tabletops or shelves. If you must place him on an elevated surface for grooming, don't leave him unattended; a fall could bring horrible consequences.
- Make sure everyone in, or visiting your home knows how to pick the puppy up. There's no reason an adult should be picked up.
- Avoid picking the puppy up too much. This can be troublesome with children who find the little fluff ball too adorable to resist, but constantly picking him up will keep the puppy from developing proper motor skills and getting exercise.

The General Supply Pen

Whether a dog is primarily a house dog or an outside dog, there are a few general supplies you will need.

- **Bowls** – If you have a puppy, you need puppy-size bowls. While it is tempting to just go ahead and get adult bowls now, this is particularly important for a Cocker Spaniel. Remember those big ears? You don't want them falling into food and picking up or dropping debris. You will find bowls in stainless steel, ceramic and plastic. If you choose ceramic you must ensure that they are not made with a lead-based glaze.
- **A collar** – Collars most commonly come in leather, nylon, or metal chain. A Cocker Spaniel isn't likely to be a wild brute in need of a metal or choker style, so a quality leather or nylon one should be fine. You may wish to buy a slide adjustable or slip ring collar to get through the initial growing spurt so you don't have to keep buying collars until the pup becomes an adult.
- **A lead or leash** – Available in the same materials as a collar, you again might choose leather or nylon. Just be on the lookout for wear and tear. You might also select a retractable leash, which is great for walks and play in public places where you may need to rein your Cocker in from contact with other people or animals. There is also a training lead, which will be discussed in the *Basic Training* chapter.
- **ID Tags** – Even if your Cocker is microchipped you should have an ID tag on the collar. If lost, most people will not think to (or care to) have the dog checked for a microchip, so unless he winds up in the hands of a shelter, the good old fashioned ID tag is still a necessity. Available in metal or plastic each has its pros and cons. Metal tags can be annoying when they clink against a license or rabies tag or metal parts of the collar; they can also be hard to read. The text on plastic can wear away easily. You won't have a lot of space so putting all of your phone numbers may be the best option. It's a sad but true reality that putting your home address on the tag can make you vulnerable. The more paranoid suggest you not even put your dog's name on the tag as an unscrupulous person can call the dog by name and no one will know it's not theirs.

They are available in many large pet stores instantly via digital engraving machines for about \$7.95 US. You can also order them online in varying shapes, colors, sizes and materials. See the Resources section for ideas.

A great alternative is the digital ID that can store up to 40 lines of text. For about \$40 US this tag can include all pertinent info plus any health issues your dog may have. It can be updated dynamically when you travel or need to update contact information. The digital display is easy to read and is currently available in English, Spanish, French, German and Italian. How cool is that?!

- **Grooming supplies** – You will of course need a good doggie shampoo, a brush and perhaps (but hopefully not), a flea comb. A toenail trimmer is also a good idea, especially if your Cocker won't have much opportunity to naturally wear down his nails. See the *Care & Nutrition* chapter for proper trimming procedures.
- **Puppy- or dog-safe chew toys** – Puppies will need small, sturdy toys that can withstand sharp little teeth. Perhaps it's from their hunting roots and scaring up booty but Cocker Spaniels really seem to love toys. Cockers are quite crafty with their toys and have been known to intentionally "lose" them in anticipation of a receiving a fascinating replacement. The more the merrier—and the Cocker is a merry dog, remember? Just like TV for kids, toys provide a distraction when you may not be able to pay as much attention. And unlike most TV for kids, they provide both physical and mental stimulation.
- **Miscellaneous** – Walk the many aisles of a well-stocked pet store and you will find a multitude of things you didn't know you needed, or that your dog wanted. Experiment with things that interest you, just make sure they are age and size appropriate.

Supply Pen for the House Dog

You should have the following items on hand, or get them as soon as possible after bringing your new Cocker home.

- **A small crate for housetraining** – This is a personal choice of course, many people swear by crate training, others do just fine without it by keeping the dog confined to a hard surface area such as the kitchen or laundry room when not at home.
- **Pet stain /odor remover** – Make sure you choose one safe for the appropriate surface type (carpet, wood, linoleum, laminate)
- **Wire mesh baby gate** – Wire mesh is better than plastic or wood, which can be easily chewed.
- **A radio** – For company at night, especially if the puppy won't sleep in your room.

The Dining Area

For ease of cleaning, you might wish to feed your dog in a room that's easy to clean, such as a kitchen with tile or linoleum flooring. Once the food is placed down, the Cocker should be left in peace to eat. He will quickly learn the signs of dinner preparation and readily take his place at the dinner table.

The Sleeping Area

To make your Cocker feel at home and secure, he should have a bedding area away from heavy human traffic but not isolated from human interaction. Unless you have strong reasons for not wanting the dog in your room, he should sleep in your bedroom—after all he is a member of the pack and you are its leader. Having him there provides security for both you and the dog plus it creates a tighter bond which leads to an increased desire to protect you.

You don't have to let him on your bed, but he should be able to see you so he doesn't feel abandoned. If you absolutely cannot have the dog in your room, at least allow it to stay for the first few days while settling in and then locate him to a place nearby. Whether he will be sleeping with you or elsewhere you need to select *what* he will sleep in; such as a crate, a box or doggie bed.

Again, this is a personal choice although just as with housetraining, the crate is often the most touted place. If you are an animal lover, crating a dog may seem cruel but the theory is that dogs are “denning” animals and will see the crate as a secure, safe “home base” or den to which they will willingly retreat for rest and/or security.

Setting up a Crate

If you intend to crate your pet you'll want one that can accommodate his full-grown size. One that's about 20 inches (50cm) tall by 24 inches (61cm) wide by 30 inches (76cm) long should do the trick. To make it comfortable for the pet and easy to clean or replace for you, do the following:

1. Make the bottom a solid surface with a piece of linoleum or plywood.
2. Cover that with a medium-thick layer of cedar chips or shavings (for comfort & some odor control)
3. Top it all off with a blanket or a washable dog bed cushion

Setting up a Bed

If you forego the crate for a dog bed, get one big enough to accommodate your full-grown Cocker in a fully-stretched pose. You'll find a variety of sizes, colors, materials and options. While it would be nice to find one that coordinates with your home décor, you must first consider the dog's comfort. A bed with raised sides will provide an extra feeling of security for pups. The filler may be a solid piece of foam or loose fill like cedar shavings. The outer cover may be a fleece-type texture or regular fabric.

Which style you choose will depend on your dog's preference and unfortunately you may not know what that preference is until you've already bought one. Some dogs will prefer the solid foam, while others will like to make a pocket for their bodies in a loose fill bed.

Costing anywhere from \$25 US to over \$100 US you may not be inclined to experiment. If possible, take your dog shopping with you at one of the chains that allow pets in the store and let him try out a few. You still may not get a good read for what he likes if he's distracted by the fun of being in a store with you, but it's worth a shot.

Supply Pen for the Outside Dog

Because of its history and predisposition as a hunter, the Cocker Spaniel is well-suited to be an outside dog. His coat will keep him cool in summer and warm in winter.

Shelter

Even the hardiest outside dog will need a comfortable, dry shelter. You can buy one already built or if you're handy with a hammer, you can build one. Whether you buy or build there a few basics to keep in mind.

- The floor should be raised several inches off the ground to keep it dry, help keep out ground-crawlers. It will also help keep the floor from becoming overly cold when the ground is cold.
- As with the crate, the Cocker's shelter should be sized so that an adult dog can comfortably stretch out. If you're not wiring the place with heating and air—as most of us don't—don't carried away with the size. Giving a Cocker a larger space than necessary will make it more difficult for him to maintain warmth from his own body heat.
- Full insulation at least equal to the rating of what is in your home, especially in colder climes.
- A flap of canvas or other heavy material over the doorway to help keep out wind and rain
- A divider “wall” to separate the entrance from the sleeping area to protect the resting pet from wind and rain.
- In colder climates face the door opening to the south to protect against cold north winds.
- Other considerations include a hinged roof and linoleum flooring for easy access and cleaning. For added comfort, you should provide a dog bed or set up the floor as described in the section on *Setting up a Crate*.

Note: Having a shelter or doghouse should not be the end-all—be-all solution for your Cocker Spaniel. When weather is severe (rain, cold, or heat), he should not be left outside for extended periods of time. Although hardy they are still living creatures and can catch colds or suffer heatstroke and other exposure-related ailments just like humans do.

Fencing

Unless you have the good fortune of living in the country with plenty of free roaming space, you'll need a fence of some sort. You can fence the whole yard (recommended height is 6 feet

[2m]) to give as much running space as possible, or if this is not practical or desired for some reason, you should put up a self-contained fenced area called a dog run. Granted, 6 feet is pretty high for a Cocker Spaniel but the other goal of a fence is to protect your pet from other animals that may have a vertical jump like Michael Jordan.

The minimum size of your run should be 4 feet by 12 feet (1.3m by 4m), and 6 feet (2m) high. If you can go bigger, do. This is one case where extra space is welcome as your Cocker will use this space for play and elimination.

There should be a pad made of stone that makes up the slab (like that of a house) to keep the ground from becoming a mud pit when it rains. You shouldn't use a concrete slab as this will retain the smell of urine. If possible, you might try to keep a portion of one end as grass for elimination. By nature a dog won't eliminate in his living quarters so having a distinct "bathroom" area may help. You will of course want to pooper scoop to keep it clean.

Bringing Puppy Home

The Ride Home

Your life changes the moment you select a puppy (or adult dog) to make your own. The trip home will most likely be your first period of prolonged time spent together. Your new Cocker, whether puppy or adult, will be a bit nervous from being removed from his familiar surroundings, plus this will probably be his first car ride (if a puppy).

Here are a few tips for the ride home:

- If at all possible, you should bring someone else along to do the driving so you can spend time holding and reassuring the little tike.
- It's a good idea to bring a towel or old sheet to cover seats or your lap in case he gets carsick.
- It's your choice whether you choose to hold him or let him sit on the seat; this decision might be based on his size.
- Request an item such as a toy or a piece of a blanket that he had with his littermates. This will help comfort him. If you will crate your dog you can put this in the crate as well.

What to Do When You Get Home

Try not to have too much activity when you enter the home. Your new arrival has already had enough excitement from the car trip home; greetings by other family members, and children in particular should be welcoming but low-key.

- Before you take him inside, place him on a leash and walk him to his potty spot. You may be pleasantly surprised that he takes his first pee after that draining car ride. If he

does, praise him. Even if you live in an apartment and will be doing most housetraining inside on paper, you should still introduce him to a spot outside while you have the chance.

- Once inside, give him about a cup of water and wait for about 15 minutes to make sure it stays in. If it does, you can safely leave the water dish down. If he's still over-excited and brings up the water, pick up the dish, wait for things to calm a little more and try again until he can drink without bringing it back up.
- If you did your prep work you should have a sample of his regular chow from the breeder. Feed him a small amount of food in the same manner he's used to (mixed with water, meat, etc.). If you plan to switch the dog to another brand (and we suggest you use a high-quality brand listing meat as the first ingredient), you can mix in a small amount of the new food and gradually decrease the old brand.
- Over the next few days, you will want to adjust the feeding schedule to suit your needs. All dogs will become accustomed to new feeding schedules as long as they are consistent. Some feed twice a day, some once. Many adult dogs can be left to graze hard kibble at their leisure, but that will come later. Trying to do this with a puppy will not only make housebreaking difficult, it could create a sick puppy that hasn't learned yet to control his eating urges.
- If you're starting out with a puppy it **must** continue to feed three to four times per day, but you can adjust what times those feedings are given.

There is more information on food and feeding in the *Care & Nutrition* chapter.

The First Night

Hopefully your first day with your Cocker will be a full day, allowing you both time to spend together before bedtime. Most likely he will take a number of catnaps (sorry) throughout the day. When bedtime does arrive, don't expect to get a lot of sleep on this first night in a new home. Even if you've decided to let him sleep in your room, he will miss the company of his littermates.

Remember how you felt as a kid awaking in a dark, strange place when on family vacation or in a hospital. It may have taken you a few moments to regain your bearings, or you may have even cried out for your mommy. Well, the new puppy will feel the same way and will wake up and whine at the loss of its mother and five or six sleepmates.

It will probably rip your heart out, but you **must not** remove him from his own bed or crate when he does this. If you do, you are teaching him the bad behavior that he can whine any time he wants out. And if you let him get away with it now, it will be near impossible to break him of it later. He needs to learn to be alone. You may have to endure this several times a night for the first few nights, but gradually he will adjust.

Here are a few tips to make the transition easier for both of you:

- Try to get the pup relaxed and tucked out by playing about an hour before bedtime.

- Try comforting items like a radio, an audibly ticking clock (although this may drive you crazy), a warm water bottle and the piece of blanket you got from the breeder.
- If you're not crating, you should section off a corner of the room with a baby gate or other blockade, making it as comfortable and den-like as possible.
- If crated, place a blanket over the top and around three sides to create a den (much like covering a birdcage calms the cackling).
- Don't yell *or* try to soothe him verbally. Yelling will obviously make an already nervous puppy more so. He's not doing anything wrong. Counterintuitive as it sounds, don't verbally soothe him either, like removing him from the crate, this will only reinforce the behavior.
- Sleep in sweats in case you need to make a midnight trip outside. The puppy will become fussy if it has to 'go' because he won't want to soil his crate. There may be several false alarms on your part but it's better to err on the side of caution. You too have to learn your Cocker's language and will get to know when he's asking to go outside. Take him straight to the designated potty spot (outside or on paper). Praise him for doing his business and place him back in the crate.
- You know how you have to pee first thing in the morning; so does your Cocker. Until he's old enough, you should let him go before you do since you have better bladder control.

Finally, you may notice after a few nights that your Cocker begins to circle his bed. This is a sign that he has become comfortable and secure with his bed. If your Cocker doesn't do this, but simply stops whining, that's good too.

Room to Explore

While you want to have as many free days as possible with your new puppy that doesn't mean you need to spend every waking moment in his presence. The idea is to simply share space and get familiar with one another. Let the new one explore the areas you designate as dog zones and provide a gentle touch when he approaches you.

After the first day you can practice leaving and returning to get your puppy used to seeing you go away for short periods of time. Have a goodbye phrase such as "Take care of the house" and leave without fanfare. Remain gone for just a few minutes and return with a pat and greeting. Repeat a couple of times.

You shouldn't let your dog get used to jumping on you when you enter or he'll greet guests that way. Not everyone will tolerate this well and you don't want to have to pay for torn or dirtied clothing. Besides, it's just bad manners.





Care & Nutrition

Grooming Your Cocker Spaniel

Start regular grooming when you first bring your dog home and make it a part of his routine. Praise your dog when he holds still and soon he will come to enjoy the extra attention. Get him used to having his paws handled while still a puppy. Once you start using the nail trimmers, go slowly: Try trimming just a few nails in one sitting.

Dogs with luxurious coats like that of the Cocker Spaniel will need deep brushing at least once a week for indoor dogs and twice or more for outdoor dogs. You need to brush against the grain and down to the skin, being sure to use a lighter touch when you reach the skin. Maintain a regular schedule and your Cocker will eventually develop patience and maybe even enjoy these sessions.

You should have the following basic grooming supplies on hand for your Cocker:

Combs & Brushes



A Wide Tooth Steel Comb to help get at the heavy undercoating of the Cocker's coat. This may also be called a "Collie comb".



A Slicker Brush has a rectangular metal brush-head and short to long handle. The brush-head contains small metal pins set in a rubber backing. The pins may have coated ball tips for added comfort. On the Cocker, this is used for the thick back and sides.



A Pin Brush can come in a variety of shapes and sizes. The Pin Brush is designed specifically for medium to long coats and can be used on single or double coated hair. The Pin Brush is recommended for finer hair so on the Cocker it is used for the feathered legs and tail. If your pin brush does not have coated ball tips then the metal ends should be polished and ground for comfort like this brush by Chris Christensen.

You will also need the following accessories:

- Nail clippers
- Tweezers
- Ear cleaning solution or white vinegar
- Cotton balls
- Grooming table (optional)

Proper Brushing

Brushing keeps a dog's coat healthy by pulling up dead skin, dead hair and undercoat, and distributing natural oil (sebum) throughout your dog's coat. This oil adds a natural sheen but also protects and moisturizes the hair.



Three easy steps for a beautiful coat

Step 1: Start by using the slicker brush to thoroughly brush his back and sides.

Remove all tangles and mats. Remember to be light-handed when near the skin.

Step 2: Use the pin brush on feathered areas such as legs, abdomen, chest, ears and tail.

Step 3: After brushing, use the comb all over to remove remaining loose hairs.

If you notice fleas during grooming see the chapter on *Health Concerns*. If you notice skin rashes or other abnormalities, contact your vet,

Bathing

Bathing frequency depends on whom you talk to. Some believe you should wash your dog as often as once per week, others say such frequent bathing removes essential oils and really isn't necessary. So if every week is too much, it still begs the question, how much is right?

The answer is whatever's right for you; it depends on how often your dog looks, feels, or smells dirty. If your Cocker is active, he may need more frequent bathing than a couch potato. And if your dog is an outside dog, good grooming and bathing should not be ignored, it should be done just as it would for a house dog.

Most likely, at least one bath a month will be sufficient so just pick a day every month and make that a part of your regular chores for the day. If you or someone in your home has allergies you may want to bump up the schedule since baths remove the dander (dead skin), which what causes the allergy.

Step 1: Thoroughly brush the dog first removing kinks and mats.

Step 2: Using a mild dog shampoo with soothing ingredients like aloe or oatmeal, start at the head and pre-soak the entire dog.

Step 3: Massage the shampoo into the coat, being careful around the eyes, nose and mouth.

Step 4: Rinse thoroughly. Residue left on the dog can be irritating to his skin.

Step 5: Towel dry the dog as much as possible after he does his shake. You may even try using a hair dryer on a low setting. Some dogs—like a certain Fox Terrier I know—will love this part, most will be afraid of the noise but over time will learn to tolerate it. If not, stick with the towels and keep them indoors until completely dry.

If your Cocker is really dirty you may have to repeat step 3 until the dog is clean. DO NOT use flea and tick shampoos if your dog already uses other flea control like collars or Advantage. You should also avoid overly-fragrant shampoos. While you may enjoy the smell of flowers, your dog might rebel at this unnatural doggie scent and take the first opportunity to roll in something smelly once outside.

Nail & Paw Care

Get your Cocker used to having his paws handled while still a puppy. Once you start using the nail trimmers, go slowly; try trimming just a few nails in one sitting. Be careful not to cut too much or you may snip the quick (center of the nail), which contains fine blood vessels and nerve endings that run through the toenail. If you lack experience you can leave this up to your vet or professional groomer and ask them to show you the correct way to use the trimmers.

Step 1: Hold the paw firmly but gently in one hand.

Step 2: Examine each nail first to identify the quick and cut as close to it as possible. If you accidentally cut the quick the nail will bleed and your Cocker will be in great pain. You can stem the bleeding with styptic powder.

The quick grows out as the nail lengthens. Hence, if you wait too long between trimmings you may have to intentionally cut the quick in order to get the nail back to normal length. It's best to avoid this agony for both of you by scheduling regular pedicures.

The frequency of which you have to trim your Cocker's nails will depend on his activity level. If he's mainly a house dog with only occasional walks outside then he will need his nails clipped more frequently than a dog that plays outside regularly. It is more difficult to see the quick in black nails so when in doubt, cut the smallest amount possible.

Before you leave the paws, check the bottoms and trim the hair between the toes and pads as short as possible. This will help your Cocker maintain traction and keep his paws healthy in foul weather.

Ear Care

Because of its long, hairy ears, the Cocker is prone to ear trouble that can develop as a result of hidden objects like food or flora. Do the following to avoid serious ear infections:

Step 1: Trim all excess hair from the ear canal.

Step 2: Carefully use tweezers to remove loose hairs from inside the ear canal.

Step 3: Remove wax buildup and clean the inside flap with a cotton ball dipped in commercial ear-cleaning solution. Commercial cleaners are good for deep cleaning. If you just need basic cleaning you can make your own organic solution by mixing two parts water to one part vinegar. Use a fresh cotton ball for each ear.

Step 4: Clean the outer part of the canal with the same solution.

Eye Care

Your Cocker's eyes should be clear and free of discharge. A sure sign of tearing is dark tearstains running down the muzzle. For light cleaning simply use a cotton ball dipped in plain water. For darker or crusty stains (shame on you, you waited too long) you may wish to use a commercial eye wash or eye wipe to gently remove dirt and tear stains.

Dental Care

Statistics from the American Veterinary Dental Society (AVDS) show that dental disease is the most common ailment among dogs over three years old; affecting as much as 85% of the population.

Just as in humans, excessive tartar can lead to gum disease and tooth loss. If your Cocker somehow manages to get excessive tartar, or you inherit one with this problem, a vet can scrape off the tartar and treat any gum problems. Your first sign of trouble may be persistent "dog

breath.” Have your dog checked by a vet to establish the severity. You may decide to go ahead and have them cleaned professionally so you can start with a clean slate.

Preventing Tartar Buildup

Dental health is in part an individual trait. A purebred with impeccable nutrition can still develop problems if it has inherited traits. Regular treats of dog biscuits, dental chews and ‘nubby’ chew toys will help prevent tartar buildup when used in conjunction with regular brushing. Yes, brushing.

Once you get over how silly it sounds, a weekly brushing will help keep your dogs teeth in top condition. Use a toothbrush topped with baking soda or doggie toothpaste. Your local pet store will have a large variety of pastes, chews, mints, brushes and other items. Experiment until you find what works and what your dog likes. Again, depending on your dog, you may have to brush more or less frequently, talk to your vet if your Cocker has special considerations. The younger you start, the easier it will be.

Nutrition

Certain pet foods make claims of providing complete nutrition for your dog according to dated standards set by the National Research Council, a division of the National Academy of Sciences. The problem with this claim is that since not all dogs are alike, one food cannot possibly be nutritionally complete for all dogs.

Now, you’re not likely to find a Cocker Spaniel-specific dog food, so the only point in telling you this is for you not to be taken in by such marketing claims. You will make food choices based on quality and ingredients. It may come as a surprise to you, but most foods sold by large scale manufacturers as “veterinarian recommended”—and even sold at your vet’s office—are *not* the best foods for your Cocker.

A discussion of the details is beyond the scope of this book but to summarize; the same agency (Association of American Feed Control Officials) that regulates commercial pig feed and deals with Mad Cow Disease (hello!) is also in charge of regulating the ingredients of pet food. Let us not forget that most feed produced by big agri-business is loaded with hormones, chemicals, sawdust, unpalatable animal parts like beaks and gosh knows what else. So, rather than pay big bucks to big companies for low quality food; spend your money on high quality foods from small companies.

What to Look for

- **Proteins** – Proteins provide amino acids essential for growth and development of strong bones and muscles. High quality animal proteins should appear at the top of the ingredients in dry, and as the first ingredient in canned food. Look for whole fresh meats from specific sources like chicken, lamb, or beef, not a generic “poultry” listing.

- **Whole Vegetables** – We don't often think of animals needing vegetables but carrots, peas, and potatoes provide roughage and help regulate a number of bodily functions.
- **Unprocessed Whole Grains** – Brown rice, barley and oatmeal provide additional roughage.
- **Fats** – Fats are a source of energy and heat. They provide essential fatty acids and fat soluble vitamins (A, D, E, K). Fats are necessary for healthy skin and coat. They should be identified by the type of meat or if from a vegetable source.

What to Avoid

- **Unknown Fat Sources** – May be listed simply as “animal fat” which could just be discarded cooking grease.
- **Protein By-Products** – Meat by-products are rarely actual meat. They are animal parts leftover after the meat has been stripped from the bone and can include blood, hooves, bones, and a host of undesired parts in the case of beef or lamb. Chicken by-products include heads, beaks, feet, entrails, intestines and basically anything else not used for human consumption.
- **Crude Protein** – Another term for the by-products listed above. Has little to no nutritional value.
- **Powdered Cellulose** – Another anomaly from the AAFCO with a fancy definition that really just means sawdust.
- **Artificial flavors and colors** – These are just chemical enhancements with little value. Your dog can't see how red a fake steak is.
- **Artificial Sweeteners & Sugar** – This is just added to entice dogs. They will after all lap up anti-freeze for its sweet taste; these can be just as lethal for your Cocker (and maybe you).

Unless you're serious about avoiding the big names on the food aisle you won't realistically be able to avoid all of these things, so if present they should be at the bottom of the ingredient list.

However, if you do want to ensure your Cocker gets the best nutrition possible; there are a number of truly high-grade pet foods that can be purchased online or at healthier food stores like Whole Foods Market.

Some ideas:

- | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|--------------|---|
| • Canidae | • Natural Balance | • Solid Gold | • Newman's Own Organics |
| • Innova | • Eagle Pack | • Wysong | • Chicken Soup for the Pet Lover's Soul |

Dry or Canned

While most dry and canned foods have similar vitamin, mineral and essential amino acids content, the quantity and nutritional values of each ingredient varies. In general, canned food contains more whole meat and poultry, which means higher quality protein. They also tend to use fewer artificial ingredients and believe it or not, they are more filling than dry food. You may opt for one or the other or a combination of the two depending on what you discover your dog prefers.



Follow the feeding guidelines written on the packaging or consult your veterinarian. Make adjustments as necessary. Note that dogs don't require a variety, it is for our human tastes that we think we should by beef this week and liver next week. It is not recommended that you switch brands frequently as you can cause upset to your Cocker's digestive system and bring about problems like diarrhea or constipation. You may be able to buy a variety of flavors within the same brand, just be careful with brand-hopping.

Changing Brands

When you do decide to change brands—such as switching from a low quality product to a high quality product—keep an eye on your Cocker's appearance and behavior. You may even wish to phase it in slowly by adding in an increasing amount with each feeding until the whole meal is made up of the new food.

There may be stool changes in the first day or so but give it a week. Take note of any other changes (good or bad) in the coat, eyes, ears, energy level and mood. If you see no changes—meaning your Cocker is as fine as he was before the switch, or you notice improvements, stick with it. If after a couple of weeks you're still not sure the switch is working try another brand.

Table Scraps

It's a personal choice whether you feed your dog table scraps; just know that if you do, you could be creating a monster. Your Cocker may come to prefer your food over his own and rebel against anything resembling dog food. He may also become a beggar, which may not bother you so much until you are embarrassed by bad manners in front company.

Too much of the wrong human food can also be unhealthy for your dog. Although some people actually cook meat and vegetables for their dogs, you may prefer to share only the occasional spare tidbit. If you do, don't feed the dog from your table, rather add it in to his own food or place it in his dish when you are done eating.

Foods That Are Dangerous for Dogs

Here is a list of a few things to NEVER feed your Cocker either because they are outright toxic to dogs or because they are simply unhealthy.

1. **Chocolate.** It's been debated whether this one is true. And in large doses it can be quite toxic causing tremors and heart arrhythmias. Chocolate contains theobromine, a compound that is a cardiac stimulant and a diuretic. While you may be able to share the smallest nibble of your favorite candy bar, it's still people food and should not be given to your dog.
2. **Macadamia nuts.** Their high phosphorus content is said to possibly lead to bladder stones and possibly temporary paralysis in dogs that eat as little as an ounce.
3. **Tomatoes and tomato plants.** Although good for humans, the tomato contains atropine, which can cause dilated pupils, tremors, and heart arrhythmias. The highest concentration of atropine is found in the leaves and stems of tomato plants, followed by unripe (green) tomatoes, followed by ripe tomatoes.
4. **Onions.** Onions contain a compound that dogs don't metabolize well, and eating large amounts of them can cause hemolytic anemia (bursting red blood cells).
5. **Moldy or slightly spoiled food.** For some reason, people will give a dog food they wouldn't eat themselves because it looks or smells 'funny'. Dogs can develop severe vomiting, diarrhea, and shock after eating spoiled food (food poisoning). So when you're cleaning out the fridge, don't use your dog as a disposal. Any food that's not fresh enough for you to eat isn't fresh enough for your dog either.
6. **Cookies and other sweets.** These have no nutritional value. You're doing your dog no favors by giving him junk food.
8. **Fried, greasy, or fatty foods.** Fried chicken, French fries, potato chips, and other high-fat foods can trigger pancreatitis in dogs. Pancreatitis causes severe abdominal pain and vomiting, and dogs often require hospitalization on IV fluids for several days to recover.
9. **Beer or other alcoholic.** While it may be amusing to see your Cocker lap up a pint of Ale with Uncle Bucky, it isn't a good idea. Some might go so far as to suggest it's animal abuse. Regardless of your stance, it simply isn't smart.
10. **Mushrooms.** Mushrooms can be toxic to dogs and it can be fatal if certain species of mushrooms are eaten. Amanita phalloides is the most commonly reported severely toxic species of mushroom in the US but other Amanita species are toxic.
11. **Grapes/Raisins.** As few as a handful of raisins or grapes can make a dog ill.
12. **Baby Food.** Can contain onion powder, which can be toxic to dogs.
13. **Bones from fish, poultry, or other meat sources.** These can cause obstruction or laceration of the digestive system.
14. **Cat Food.** It's called cat food for a reason. Cat food is generally too high in protein and fats for your Cocker.

15. **Milk and other dairy products.** Some adult dogs do not have sufficient amounts of lactase to break down the lactose in milk. This can result in diarrhea. Lactose-free milk products are available for pets.

16. **Raw Eggs.** You may have heard that raw eggs are good for your animal's coat. This isn't necessarily true as raw eggs contain an enzyme called avidin, which decreases the absorption of biotin (a B vitamin). This can lead to skin and hair coat problems. Raw eggs may also contain Salmonella.

17. **Raw Fish.** Feeding your dog raw fish can result in thiamine (a B vitamin) deficiency leading to loss of appetite, seizures, and in severe cases, death. So, no sushi for Suzy!

People foods aren't the only things your dog may eat that can cause him harm. Many of them are readily available plants that could be in your own yard or local park depending on the region where you live.

Following is an extensive chart showing natural plants that could be toxic if ingested by your Cocker.

Toxic Plants:

Not all edible items are food. There are also a number of common household and outdoor plants that can be toxic to your dog as well so we've decided to list them here. The following charts show some of the more common plants to watch out for.

PLANT	TOXIC PART	SYMPTOMS
HOUSE PLANTS		
Hyacinth, Narcissus, Daffodil	Bulbs	Nausea, vomiting, diarrhea. May be fatal.
Oleander	Leaves, branches	Extremely poisonous. Affects the heart, produces severe digestive upset and has caused death.
Dieffenbachia (Dumb Cane), Elephant Ear	All parts	Intense burning and irritation of the mouth and tongue. Death can occur if base of the tongue swells enough to block the air passage of the throat.
Rosary Pea, Castor Bean	Seeds	Fatal. A single Rosary Pea seed has caused death. One or two Castor Bean seeds are near the lethal dose for adults.
FLOWER AND GARDEN		
Larkspur	Young plant, seeds	Digestive upset, nervous excitement, depression. May be fatal.
Monkshood	Fleshy roots	Digestive upset and nervous excitement.
Autumn Crocus, Star of Bethlehem	Bulbs	Vomiting and nervous excitement.
Iris	Underground stems	Severe-but not usually serious-digestive upset.
Lily-of-the-Valley	Leaves, flowers	Irregular heart beat and pulse, usually accompanied by digestive upset and mental confusion.
Foxglove	Leaves	Large amounts cause dangerously irregular heartbeat and pulse, usually digestive upset and mental confusion. May be fatal.
Bleeding Heart	Foliage, roots	May be poisonous in large amounts. Has proved fatal to cattle.
VEGETABLE GARDEN		
Rhubarb	Leaf blade	Fatal. Large amounts of raw or cooked leaves can cause convulsions, coma, followed rapidly by death.
ORNAMENTAL		
Daphne	Berries	Fatal.
Wisteria	Seeds, pods	Mild to severe digestive upset.
Golden Chain	Bean-like capsules in which the seeds are suspended	Severe poisoning. Excitement, staggering, convulsions and coma. May be fatal.
Laureals, Rhododendrons, Azaleas	All parts	Fatal. Produces nausea and vomiting, depression, difficult breathing, prostration and coma.
Yew	Berries, foliage	Fatal. Foliage more toxic than berries. Death is usually sudden without warning symptoms.
Jasmine	Berries	Fatal.
Lantana Camara (Red Sage)	Green berries	Fatal. Affects lungs, kidneys, heart and nervous system. Grows in the southern U.S. And in moderate climates.

PLANT	TOXIC PART	SYMPTOMS
TREES AND SHRUBS		
Wild and cultivated cherries	Twigs, foliage	Fatal. Contains a compound that releases cyanide when eaten. Gasping, excitement and prostration are common symptoms.
Oaks	Foliage, acorns	Affects kidneys gradually. Symptoms appear only after several days or weeks. Takes a large amount for poisoning.
Elderberry	All parts, especially roots	Nausea and digestive upset.
Black Locust	Bark, sprouts, foliage	Nausea, weakness
WOODED AREAS		
Jack-in-the-Pulpit	All parts, especially roots	Like Dumb Cane, contains small needle-like crystals of calcium oxalate that cause intense irritation and burning of the mouth and tongue.
Moonseed	Berries	Blue, purple color, resembling wild grapes. May be fatal.
Mayapple	Apple, foliage, roots	Contains at least 16 active toxic principles, primarily in the roots.
Mistletoe	Berries	Fatal
MOIST AREAS		
Water Hemlock	All parts	Fatal. Violent and painful convulsions.
PLANTS IN FIELDS		
Buttercups	All parts	Irritant juices may severely injure the digestive system.
Nightshade	All parts, especially the unripened berry	Fatal. Intense digestive disturbance and nervous symptoms.
Poison Hemlock	All parts	Fatal. Resembles a large wild carrot.
Jimson Weed (Thorn Apple)	All parts	Abnormal thirst, distorted sight, delirium, incoherence and coma. Common cause of poisoning. Has proved fatal.

*Adapted from entirelypets.com

Special Needs

Advances in animal health have led to the development of foods for dogs with special dietary needs. If your Cocker is overweight, active, inactive, a senior citizen or has a medical ailment; there is a food to fit his needs. Just follow the same quality guidelines for selecting other dog foods and consult your vet before you self-prescribe a particular treatment.



Treats

Chewing treats will help satisfy the physical and emotional need to chew. Not all adult dogs are constant chewers but growing puppies will definitely need something on which to teeth. You should choose treats that are appropriate for your Cocker's age and size.

The choices include rawhides, pig ears, beef ears, lamb ears and huge dried beef bones. There are countless other treats made to resemble bacon and steak and may be made from real meat or mostly man-made ingredients. Choose the best quality available as with regular dog food. You will also

find deer or pig hooves but these should be avoided as they are not supple and can damage teeth.

Water

Water is quite possibly the most important part of a healthy diet. Fresh water should be available at all times. The amount your cocker drinks will depend on the temperature, what type of food he eats, and how much exercise he gets.





Health Concerns

General Concerns

Cocker Spaniels are susceptible to a variety of maladies, particularly infections affecting their ears and skin. As a result, they may require more medical attention than some other breeds.

You can avoid many of the ear and skin problems by simply grooming the dog regularly to remove vegetation and other foreign objects from the ears and tangles from the coat. If the ears appear dirty, use a cotton ball moistened with a medicated solution to clean them as described in the "Grooming" section of the *Care & Nutrition* chapter. It is also helpful to use deep, narrow bowls that allow them to eat and drink without getting their ears into the food or water.

Preventive Medicine

Preventive care simply entails doing those things with your Cocker that you've already learned in previous chapters; mainly good diet, exercise, and grooming plus vaccinations from your vet.

Symptoms of Illness

Symptoms are a clue that something is wrong with your Cocker. Since your dog cannot talk and they easily mask problems, if he is not just flat out whining in misery, it is especially important to recognize signs that your dog isn't feeling up to snuff.

All dog owners should look out for the following changes in appearance or behavior:

Physical exhaustion	Loss of appetite	Excessive appetite	Loss of, or excessive thirst	Runny nose
Excessive coughing	Ear or eye discharge	Blood in the stool	Unusually bad breath	Shakes or trembling
Limping	Poor coat or hair loss	Trouble urinating	Whimpering or moaning	Diarrhea or Vomiting

As with babies, vomiting and diarrhea can be nothing more than a simple part of growing up and may be the result of eating something that didn't agree with him. Persistent vomiting and/or diarrhea, however, signals digestive distress and should be reported to your vet.

Spaying & Neutering

Another often ignored health preventive is spaying and neutering. Many people misunderstand the necessity for this procedure and mistakenly think it's cruel. However, the opposite can be true. If you will not breed or show your Cocker, then you should strongly consider having him or her spayed or neutered.

Aside from helping to control the unwanted pet population, there can be dire health consequences to an unaltered Cocker. Spaying a female will reduce the risk of breast tumors, ovarian cysts and false pregnancies. You will also not have to deal with cleaning up carpets, furniture, and bedding when she is in season.

Neutering a male will keep from driving him and you crazy when he cannot satisfy his urges to get at a female in season. You cannot appreciate the relief from a male dog's lusty suffering until you have lived through it so it's best for both of you to neuter early. Spaying and neutering will also calm the urges for either sex to run off in search of a mate.

When to Spay or Neuter

Generally, both male and female puppies should be "fixed" between four and six months of age. Most dogs heal quickly and will recuperate within just a few days although they should be kept from jumping and other strenuous activities until the stitches are removed or dissolved (depending on what kind your doctor uses).

Females – When the female is spayed she undergoes the equivalent of a hysterectomy with her entire reproductive system (uterus, fallopian tubes, ovaries) being removed. In the United States it is commonly believed that a female should be spayed within her first year, before she goes into her first season. In Europe, however, it is a commonly held belief that spaying early can increase urinary incontinence.

So, the decision comes down to the choice between this and the increased risk of potential cancers. If your lady Cocker has already gone into season, you should wait at least eight weeks before having the procedure in order to allow her progesterone levels to even out. Not doing so could increase surgical risk, irritability, depression and aggression. Dominant females, however, may actually become more aggressive.

Males – When the male is neutered his testicles are removed from the scrotum. The skin that covered them may remain swollen for a short while but once completely healed it will shrink and not be visible. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the male should be done before or after puberty. Most vets will not want to operate on a puppy as young as eight weeks old, but it has been done.

Others think waiting until the male has developed his masculine characteristics—up to a year old—is best. As with females, some vets believe that neutering will help prevent or reduce the chances of gender-related ailments such as prostate cancer. If you have a male with roaming, marking or aggression problems, neutering may also help improve his behavior.

There is a newer method of chemical castration whereby a sterilant is injected directly into the scrotum. While the procedure is less invasive than surgery it does not stop the production of testosterone and hence does not control behavior problems.

Summary of advantages to spay or neuter:

<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>
Eliminates cancers of reproductive system	Less aggression toward other dogs
May respond to commands better	Receives less aggression from other dogs
Reduces chance of breast cancer	Easier to train
Reduce chance of uterine infections	Reduce chance of testicular cancer
Both sexes have the potential for weight gain but can be controlled with proper feeding	

About Vaccinations

Tradition holds that there are five infectious diseases for which your Cocker should be vaccinated. They are distemper, hepatitis, parvovirus, parainfluenza and leptospirosis. Additionally most states require rabies shots. Today there is some debate over the necessity and efficacy of certain vaccinations, see the “Vet” section of Chapter 5 for more details on vaccinations.

Distemper – Is a highly contagious viral disease that is spread through bodily fluids. Once second to rabies in its risk to canines, it is difficult for a vaccinated dog to get distemper today.

Canine Hepatitis -- Is a contagious viral disease that attacks the liver and gastrointestinal system. Like distemper, it is also spread via bodily fluids. This is fatal to unvaccinated puppies although older dogs may be treatable.

Parvovirus – There are two forms of this disease; one causes inflammation of the heart muscles in young puppies. Infected animals collapse and die rather quickly. The other, more common form causes foamy, yellow-brown vomit and foul-smelling diarrhea. This is also transmitted via bodily fluids and an untreated dog will die within several days from dehydration.

Parainfluenza – This is caused by a virus that produces a mild respiratory tract infection. It is often associated with other respiratory tract viruses and is usually transmitted by contact with the nasal secretions of infected dogs.

Leptospirosis – This is a bacterial disease that impairs kidney function and can result in kidney failure. Symptoms include vomiting, impaired vision, and convulsions. The disease is transmitted by contact with the urine of infected animals or by contact with objects that have been contaminated with the urine of infected animals.

Rabies – Rabies is probably the most well-known viral disease because it affects a variety of wild animals, it is still one of the most lethal diseases for dogs, and can be transmitted to humans. It attacks the nervous system giving us the vision of the crazed, foaming mouthed rabid raccoon terrorizing the neighborhood. It is usually transmitted by a bite but humans who seek medical attention quickly can be prevented from developing the disease.

When to Vaccinate

First shots are given at around six to eight weeks of age (right when you're ready to bring puppy home and are usually given by the breeder). The second round between 11 and 12 weeks and the third booster at 15 or 16 weeks. Once the full set of shots is complete, most vets will recommend an annual booster although in 2003 the AMVA recommends the core vaccinations be administered every three years instead of annually. Talk with your vet about the optimal schedule and required vaccinations for your lifestyle and dog's condition.

Internal and External Parasites

Internal

Worms are the most common internal parasite in dogs. Intestinal worms share many of the same symptoms; some are visible in the stool, others may not be. If you notice diarrhea, cramps, irregular appetite, bloated belly and lethargy you should collect a stool sample for your vet to analyze and confirm which type of worm your Cocker has for proper treatment.

Roundworms

Puppies are often born with roundworms which they get from their mother's milk or placenta. You will notice white, cylindrical, wriggling worms in your dog's stool. Roundworms can grow up to four inches (10cm) long.

Puppies should be treated by your vet immediately as this can prove lethal to their little bodies. Adults usually have time to be treated but you should still seek medical attention as soon as you notice the signs.

Tapeworms

Tapeworms also live in the intestines. The most common cause of tapeworm is the already pesky flea, which carries the eggs. If your dog swallows a carrier flea the tapeworm will then grow in its intestines. This worm is characterized by hooks and suckers, which it uses to latch into the small intestines.

If you have a weak stomach, you may want to stop reading this section and just know that you need to have your Cocker checked. If you're still interested, the tapeworm grows in a long, segmented chain. The tail section contains many eggs and upon occasion the worm will release the tail, which is visible in the stool and looks like grains of rice. They also often stick to the hair surrounding the dog's anus. Symptoms may take a while to develop so your Cocker may have had them for a while before you notice anything.

Heartworm

Heartworm is most common in warm, sultry climates or anywhere that hosts mosquitoes, like in stagnant waters. Infestations can be fatal if not treated immediately. They live in the lumen of the dog's heart, producing thousands of young per day. Heartworms are transmitted by mosquitoes, which carry the larvae. When bitten the larvae enters the dog's system, eventually making its way to the heart. Heartworm can be treated and is prevented with a monthly treat-like medication such as Heartgard.

External

External parasites include fleas, ticks, lice and mites. Unless an animal is completely neglected and infested none of these alone is lethal, but as mentioned in the previous section, they can carry other diseases. They can make your dog very uncomfortable and cause pain. Each is easily preventable and treatable.

Fleas

By far, fleas are the most common external parasite your Cocker will have to deal with. Fleas exist in most environments except for high elevations or in extremely dry environments. They have a tremendous jumping ability; some leaping as high as 36 inches! So, every animal is vulnerable.

Once on your dog they furrow under the coat and bite and suck the blood, causing severe itching. Even if your dog isn't outside for long, a flea can hitch a ride on a human. Once inside, the larvae can remain dormant for a long period of time.

You will probably be able to see fleas on your Cocker during grooming and bath time, but excessive scratching, scabs and dark specs, or "flea dirt," found on the skin can all be signs that your pet has become the host for a family of fleas. Find out from your veterinarian when flea season is in your area and start a regimen beginning two or so weeks prior to the start of the season. Talk to your vet about the best course of prevention and treatment for your Cocker which could be flea collars, powders, shampoos, dips, sprays, or foggers.

Most of these products contain natural or synthetic ingredients that either kill existing adults and/or retard eggs from hatching and growth of the larvae. Yard and house foggers usually aren't the best option as you will be spraying your entire living environment with toxic ingredients. Plus, in some climates, yard treatments may have very little effect.

So, treatment of the dog is the best option, just be aware that if you already have an infestation it will take the lifecycle of the flea (3 to 6 weeks) to be rid of them, so you will have to treat a couple of times within this period to kill the initial adults and then the emerging ones. Most dogs tolerate the monthly topical treatments like Frontline or Advantage well and these seem to work better than the brands available at the store, try different brands and stick with what works for you.

Remember, if you are using one of these products, you do not also need to use a flea shampoo.

Ticks

There are a number of ticks that can dine on your precious pooch, making those first few moments of attachment painful enough to produce a yelp. Most can transmit other diseases as with other biting pests.

Wood Tick

The wood tick is one of the larger of the species. As it feeds, its gray body becomes engorged with your dog's blood and will eventually fall off. Disgusting and scary as it is to find one, the wood tick is harmless.

Dog Tick & Lonestar Tick

Dog ticks are found mainly in the eastern US, Lonestar in the west (perhaps so named because females have single silvery-white spots on their backs). Both of these are small but visible brown ticks that are known to spread Rocky Mountain Spotted Fever. Symptoms of RMSF include depression, fever, severe lethargy and possibly vomiting.

Deer Tick

The deer tick is a very small brown tick that may not be visible to the naked eye. It is the primary carrier of Lyme disease. Lyme disease is characterized by fever, stiffness, generalized pain, joint inflammation and rashes. It can be treated with antibiotics if caught early.

Lice

Lice burrow in and suck blood just as other external parasites do. You will see clusters of eggs on your dog's hair. Lice can be very dangerous but is treatable by your vet. Dog lice are not the same lice found on humans so there is no human threat from your dog.

Mites

The ugly and sometimes lethal skin disease mange is caused by a mite infestation. Tiny pinhead size mites burrow into your dog's skin, causing intense itching that leads to swollen, bloody sores in patches of bald skin. This most visible version is called Sarcoptic mange. A less obvious variety called Demodectic mange is harder to detect *and* harder to treat. It may cause only slight hair loss and skin irritation.

Other Skin Ailments

Eczema & Ringworm

Eczema and Ringworm are other skin disorders that can affect your Cocker. Eczema is a general name for a variety of skin ailments that can come from parasites, poor nutrition, hormonal imbalances or allergies. Cockers are afflicted by a form of eczema that causes crusting of the skin; its cause is unknown but can be treated by your vet.

Contrary to what the name implies, ringworm is not a worm, it is a fungus. Affecting the outer layer of the skin, hair and nails, ringworm can cause inflammation, itching, hair loss and scabby patches. Some forms of ringworm can be transmitted to humans so immediate vet attention is required. Any humans that came in contact with your pooch should also be tested and treated.

Most of these parasites and ailments should be easily avoidable in a well-groomed and cared for Cocker but things do happen. If you suspect any of these problems are present its best to go to the vet and let her properly diagnose the problem. You should always err on the side of caution.

Common Cocker Spaniel Ailments

Eye problems in cockers include:

- Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) – a hereditary disease of the retina that leads to blindness
- Glaucoma – an optic nerve disease that can lead to blindness
- Cataracts – opacity of the lens or capsule of the eye, causing impairment of vision or blindness

The American Spaniel Club recommends annual eye exams by a veterinary ophthalmologist for all dogs used for breeding.

Auto-immune problems in Cockers

Autoimmune hemolytic anemia (AIHA) – a condition in which the dog's immune system attacks some offending agent such as a parasite, but manages to injure the red blood cells as well.

Von Willebrand's disease (vWD)

Von Willebrand's disease is a common, usually mild, inherited bleeding disorder caused by a lack of von Willebrand factor (vWF), which plays an essential role in the blood clotting process. A dog with this disorder can hemorrhage from the smallest cut, so it is imperative that your vet know if your dog has this condition.

Because this is a genetic disorder, you may wish to inquire if your dog has been tested for this prior to buying him. At this writing the Cocker isn't identified as one of the handful of breeds known to be widely afflicted but a clearance certificate will ease any concerns.

Depending on the severity of the dog's condition, several treatment options may be available and range from simply giving oral doses of vitamin K to costly plasma transfusions.

Other Cocker-specific health issues include:

- Heart problems
- Epilepsy

Luxating patella – This is the dislocation of the kneecap. Surgery is often the last resort as most dogs will still be able to get around, although they may not be able to jump around as much.

Hip dysplasia – this is caused by a malformed ball and socket in the hip joint that appears as the dog gets older (near five months). This results in a painful inflammation in the hip joint, which can lead to permanent damage like lameness.

At one time dogs with hip dysplasia were put to sleep but now there is surgery that can reshape the hip socket or perform a complete hip replacement. Unfortunately the specialists are still few and the costs are high. For this reason, you will want a Cocker that has been issued a hip clearance certificate.

Dogs used for breeding can be checked for these latter two conditions and dogs free of hip dysplasia can be certified by the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA). Learn more about OFA health certificates in Chapter 5.

Allergies – Just like humans, dogs can also suffer from allergies. Itching of the skin is the most common symptom of a dog allergy. The respiratory tract can be affected causing coughing, sneezing, and/or wheezing. At times, the eyes and nose may develop a discharge. Also, the digestive system may be affected causing vomiting or diarrhea.

It's estimated that about 20 percent of the dogs in the United States suffers from some type of

allergy, whether it be atopic dermatitis, flea allergy, food allergy, inhalant allergy, contact allergy, or bacterial allergy.

Canine atopic dermatitis affects the skin and is caused by the dog's hypersensitivity to common substances in the environment, such as dust mites or molds. If your Cocker begins to groom excessively, with licking or chewing of the paws, abdomen, and hind quarters, then it may suffer from atopic dermatitis. Unfortunately, other allergies can mimic the symptoms of atopic dermatitis making it difficult to diagnose but your veterinarian can test to see what type of allergy your Cocker is suffering from.

Atopic dermatitis is easily treatable with cortisone products like prednisone, however this will only alleviate the symptoms. To treat the cause your vet may suggest over-the-counter antihistamines to control itching.

Flea Allergy

The most common form of canine allergy is flea allergy dermatitis. The flea itself is not the cause; it is their saliva that causes the allergic reaction.

Depending on the severity, a regular flea control regimen will reduce or eliminate symptoms. Your vet should rule out other skin-related allergies and help prescribe a flea control plan. If your dog has already developed the allergy the vet may administer a cortisone shot to alleviate itching.

Inhalant Allergy

As in humans, canine inhalant allergies are caused by environmental pollens, dust mites, molds, and chemicals. The symptoms of an inhalant allergy include scratching, biting, chewing at feet and constant licking. The itching may be most severe on feet, flanks, groin, and armpits.

Seemingly unrelated, inhalant allergies are often the reason for recurrent ear infections in your dog. Your vet may suggest over the counter treatments.

Food Allergy

Dogs can become allergic to food they have eaten for years which causes many people to overlook the possibility of a food allergy. Food sensitivities in a dog may manifest as itchy skin, scratching at ears, shaking of the head, licking and biting at the hind quarters or feet, rubbing faces on carpeting, ear inflammations, coughing, and rarely vomiting, diarrhea, flatulence, sneezing, asthma like symptoms, behavioral changes, seizures, gagging, and vomiting.

Dogs generally cannot tolerate soy, wheat, corn, beef, pork, chicken, milk, whey, eggs, fish, chemical preservatives, or artificial sugars in their food.

Feeding your dog foods with grains like oat, rice or potatoes; and proteins like fish may help. You will probably have to experiment with different foods to eliminate the exact culprit, and it

may take up to eight weeks before you notice improvement. Hill's, Iam's and Nature's Recipe Allergy make allergen-free foods just for the sensitive dog.

Contact Allergy

Contact allergy is the least common of all the types of dog allergies. Some of the common contact allergens include flea collars, wood bedding, grass, plants, and sometimes chemicals. Once identified you would simply need to remove the irritant and find a suitable replacement; such as using a topical anti-flea solution instead of a collar.

Bacterial Allergy

Several species of Staphylococcus (Staph) bacteria live on normal dog skin. Normally Staph does not cause a problem with its host, but some dogs develop an allergy to it.

With this type of allergy the dog develops areas of hair loss that look much like ring worm. These areas become infected and need to be treated with antibiotics. The Staph allergic dog usually has recurrent Staph infections.

Anal glands

Have you noticed your Cocker 'scooting' across the carpet as if to scratch his bum? We often presume this is an indication of worms, but that's probably not the case. It could be his anal glands or sacs. Also not a pretty subject but it is controllable.

The anal glands are positioned on either side of the anus (inside) and secrete a vile-smelling substance. Normal defecation usually keeps the glands emptied, but in some dogs, impactions and infections can become a problem. Infections of the anal glands are not uncommon, and they need to be treated by your veterinarian. In some cases, chronic infections may require removal of the glands.

Emptying the glands

You can try first to feed your dog more fiber to help add bulk to his stool. If this doesn't work, you can try the following methods to help your Cocker empty these glands.

Internal Method	External Method
Hold a rag or tissue up to the anus, moving the tail out of the way. Squeeze both sides of the anal area until the substance is secreted. If the secretion is very pasty, this method may be inadequate to empty the sacs.	Lubricate a gloved finger and insert into the anus. Squeeze the left sac between thumb and forefinger, allowing the secretion to go into a tissue held externally. Repeat on the other side. The full anal gland feels like a grape.

If you're unable to fully empty the glands or simply can't stomach the idea, you may find it well worth your money to have the groomer do it for you on regular visits, just ask.

Cancer

Cockers are also pre-disposed to develop a certain type of cancer. The actual percentage of Cockers with cancer isn't necessarily high compared to other breeds, but just as with people and some other dog breeds, they are genetically at higher risk to develop certain cancers.

To reduce the risk of cancer to any dog, limit exposing the animal to secondhand smoke. Studies show mixed results on the connection between animal cancers and human smoke, but it's always a good idea to avoid these situations just as you would around children and non-smokers (right?).

Nursing an Ill Cocker

Just as with any parent, you should be able to administer basic first aid to your Cocker in case of minor injuries or scrapes with sticker brushes. Or, to patch him up until you can get to a vet for more serious problems.

Keep a doggie first aid kit on hand. You can either buy a prefab kit or make one of your own. A good kit—such as those used by police and other dog professionals—should contain the following items:

- Gauze sponges and bandages to clean, cover and cushion wounds.
- Triple antibiotic ointment to inhibit bacterial growth in cuts and abrasions. Promotes wound healing.
- Rubbing alcohol to clean away dirt or debris, not recommended on open wounds
- Ear syringe to remove foreign objects, discharge or blood.
- Self-adhering athletic bandage.
- White petroleum jelly to lubricate the thermometer.
- Eye wash to clean particles from the eye.
- Sterile, non-adherent pads won't pull of scabbed wounds
- Pepto Bismol tablets for upset stomach (some vets don't like using on dogs, but should be OK in an emergency)
- Low dose (25mg) Benadryl capsules, for allergies
- Hydrocortisone 1% percent cream for itching
- Regular buffered aspirin (general aches and inflammation)
- Cloth tape for taping gauze, etc.
- Hydrogen peroxide for cleansing wounds or burns.
- Scissors to cut tape, gauze and to clip hair around wounds.

- Splints to stabilize broken bones
- Vet Wrap (A flexible bandage used to wrap and stabilize injuries. Adheres to itself without clips or tape)
- Tweezers to remove foreign objects from skin and paws.
- Digital rectal thermometer
- Gloves to protect hands and prevent contamination of open wounds, burns and abrasions.
- Cold Pack to reduce swelling or pain.

Other suggested items to have on hand:

- Emergency Blanket to prevent shock. Can also be used to protect a car if the animal is vomiting or bleeding.
- Any special medications your dog needs.
- Muzzle to protect an injured dog from biting you or himself.
- Ziploc bags for safe waste disposal or bodily fluid samples.
- Folder containing the dog's health record, medications, local and national poison control numbers, veterinary clinic hours and telephone numbers, and emergency clinic hours and telephone number.

If you know that your dog's wounds should heal with normal first aid then you can handle the recovery yourself. If you're not sure about the extent of damage or the condition worsens, aid your Cocker as best you can and visit your vet or an emergency vet clinic as soon as possible.

Doggie Temperature

Most of the above items are self-explanatory or you already know how to use them from life experience but the thermometer could bear some explanation. The normal adult Cocker temperature ranges from 100.5° F to 102.5° F (38-39.1° C), puppies are slightly higher. To take the temperature, lubricate with petroleum jelly and gently insert the thermometer. A digital thermometer will beep when it is ready. If you're using a glass thermometer wait about two to three minutes.

Try to handle a squirmy dog by firmly holding its head in the crook of your arm first; then insert the thermometer. A degree higher or lower is no cause for alarm but a markedly high temperature spells trouble. An unusually low temperature could be a sign of poisoning.

Caring for the Aging Cocker

Although your Cocker may stay youthful and playful for many years, it can be hard to remember that they're aging more rapidly than we are. Inevitably the day will come when his step is not so

peppy, his eyes are not so bright and his hearing is no longer keen. How do you know when your Cocker Spaniel is officially a senior citizen?

While it's generally accepted that pets become the equivalent of senior citizens around age seven, various dog breeds reach this milestone at different ages based on their size and weight. For your Cocker Spaniel it is between seven and nine years of age. This is the time when health needs change.

Visible signs of aging include changes in appetite or weight, increased thirst or urination, dulling or thinning of fur, difficulty moving, and loss of interest in activities, among others. If left unchecked, conditions related to aging can result in reduced lifespan or unnecessary pain and suffering for your Cocker.

You will need to pay extra attention to your Cocker's diet and lifestyle. You may also have to conduct twice-yearly veterinary visits for screenings of potential health problems such as arthritis, heart disease, vision and hearing impairments, Cognitive Dysfunction Syndrome (altered mental functioning) and other aging-related ailments.

What You Can Do

Recent studies show that you can help maintain the youthfulness of your aging Cocker with mental stimulation and an enriched diet. A study performed on Beagles showed that dogs who received a diet fortified with vitamins E, C and other antioxidants fared better than those without these nutrients.

The study also showed that dogs within a mentally stimulating environment, with kennel mates and exercise had a lower rate of decline over a two-year period than others.

Make life comfortable

Here are a few things you can do to care for the older dog. Whether or not he has specific pains, making life comfortable is always a good idea.

Avoid Change – Some older dogs are easily stressed by change. Unless you have to make a big move across country, try not to change up your dog's environment or routine too much.

Aches & Pains – Treat aches and pains such as arthritis with mild heat, buffered aspirin or an anti-inflammatory. Also make sure that your Cocker isn't carrying extra weight that could stress joints.

Elevate Food Dishes – Raise the food dishes off the floor. Some people like these for any dog believing it makes eating and swallowing easier for taller dogs. Place dishes on a low stable table or purchase a pre-made 'feeding station'.

Add Traction to Flooring – If you have carpet in all of the dog's areas that's about all you need. But if you have hard surface flooring it would be helpful to add traction by placing carpets and non-slip throw rugs.

Make Toys & Water Accessible – Place favorite toys and water dishes around the house so he doesn't have to travel so far to get at them.

Traveling Help – Unless your Cocker is really too ill to go with you, don't stop taking him along, some simple solutions can make it easier. If he has trouble entering an exiting the car, try a ramp, or give him a boost by lifting his rump.

Create a Spa – Well, it may not be a real spa with massages and exotic food but you'll provide your older Cocker's bones with a soft place to land by putting beds throughout your Cocker's favorite areas.

Modify Activities – You can make walks and playtime easier by modifying how you play. As an example, if your dog loved to retrieve sticks but can no longer make the run to fetch it, try hide & seek instead. Place him in the 'sit and stay' command and let him watch you hide the stick. Tell him to "Find it" and as always, offer up praise when he finds it. You should be able to make the hiding place more difficult as you go along.

Hearing Loss

Hearing loss doesn't have to be a horrible experience for either you or your pet. If you suspect hearing loss, you can test it by clapping your hands from behind your dog and seeing if he reacts. Of course he will have to make some adjustments but if you used hand signals when obedience training your Cocker, the transition should be easier as you can simply continue with these signals. If you didn't train with them before, you should start while your Cocker still has some hearing.

Loss of Vision

Dogs in general are subject to loss of visual acuity thanks to glaucoma or cataracts. These can be surgically treated but the cost is often prohibitive. And with the added potential for Cockers to have hereditary eye problems, you will want to pay particular attention to visual changes. While it can be tough for a human to adjust to watching her dog lose sight, the dog will usually adjust fairly well.

Remember, a dog's primary sense is smell so while he may have to high-step when walking or bump a few corners, his nose will still do most of the work. Once he remembers the layout of furniture or a yard, he probably won't bump much at all; just don't rearrange things too often.

Incontinence

Incontinence or leaking urine can be a problem in the older dog as they lose bladder control. Spayed females seem to have more issues with this than other dogs. If you begin to notice

wetting ‘mistakes’ around the house, have your vet determine if the problem can be controlled with a dietary change, it could be an infection.

Spayed females can be treated with a daily medication such as a synthetic estrogen that will help with muscle control. The most serious side effect of estrogen therapy is bone marrow suppression and toxicity that may progress to a fatal aplastic anemia. Other side effects include signs of estrus, lethargy, diarrhea, vomiting, vaginal discharge, pyometra, polydipsia, polyuria, and feminization of male dogs.

Don’t scold the dog; it’s a biological function that cannot be helped. If the problem is prevalent, you may need to let him stay in the kitchen or other room with a tiled floor.

Dealing with Loss

Whether you’ve spent many happy years with your Cocker or just a short time, losing a pet can be a traumatic experience. It’s even more so if you have to make the decision to put him to sleep, but it is a necessary evil of life.

Politely known as euthanasia, this is the process by which your vet will painlessly put your dog to sleep using a concoction injected into his veins. When considering this, you have to think more about the dog’s quality of life and suffering than your own loss. A sympathetic vet will understand the personal difficulty you face and can offer advice on the best course of action but only you can make the final decision.

Many vets will make a home visit for this procedure if asked so that both you and your dog can have this experience in the comfort of your own home rather than in an impersonal, clinical setting. The cost is usually just a few dollars more than an in-office procedure. If, however, you cannot emotionally handle this personal option then rest assured your vet will take equal care in his office.

What to Expect

You may choose to hold your Cocker Spaniel in your lap or arms, or simply be nearby, depending on your emotional state and where the procedure is being done. The vet will first issue a sedative to relax the dog. Almost immediately he will become groggy and may close his eyes. Most dogs will simply relax but a few may experience an involuntary reaction causing them to appear excited or agitated. Rest assured, he is not in pain.

Next will come an overdose of anesthesia that will quickly (within seconds) travel to the heart and brain. By this point your dog will appear to be in a deep sleep and his suffering will be over. Your vet will listen to his heart with a stethoscope to verify it has stopped. Most likely the vet will explain what she is doing at each step of the process and tell you what will happen, with a final confirmation at the end.

You may choose to have some private time with the body if the procedure was done in-office. At home you may choose to create an eternal resting place in your yard or have him cremated. If

you will cremate, the vet can take the dog's body to his office and hold it until it is picked up by the crematory. Most vets have scheduled pickups with crematories and will gladly provide this service for you.

You may have to coordinate cremation efforts between the crematory and your vet yourself or the vet may make all arrangements for you, but you obviously need to make these arrangements in advance so everyone knows what to expect.

Handling Grief

You will experience the normal stages of grief: denial, guilt, anger or blame, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Your vet or the crematory may provide you with information on handling the loss of your pet. One popular item is the anonymous "Rainbow Bridge" poem. A number of websites have the poem posted. See the Resources section for one place where you can find this online in 14 languages.





Cocker Boot Camp Basic Training

Selecting a Program

Even though the English breed is used more for hunting today than the American, its inherent breeding as a hunter makes the Cocker Spaniel relatively easy to train. What's great about those natural hunting instincts is that the Cocker can be trained at an earlier age than many other breeds. The Cocker Spaniel responds better to gentle encouragement than it does to physical force, so a gentle hand is best.

The quality of learning depends on the quality of teaching. That's a big responsibility to place on your shoulders but it's a big deal to bring home a new dog and you certainly don't want to be burdened with a disobedient, wild beast. You will enjoy life with your dog much more if he masters the basics.

If it seems your commands are being ignored, give it a moment and continue trying; Cockers can be easily distracted. If it builds to a level of frustration for you, end the session and try again later or on another day.

Basic Training Lessons

The Name – Before you can really train seriously your dog needs to have a name because calling him by name will be a part of the rest of his training. Since training starts the day you get home, it is important that you have a name as soon as possible, if not before you even bring him home. Simply use the dog's new name every time you interact with him and he'll have it figured out in about three days.

The No – Children and puppies need to learn the meaning of “No” as soon as they enter your house. Even though you’ve puppy-proofed (you did, didn’t you?) your home as discussed in an earlier chapter, your curious pup will still find things to get into. Every time you see him do something wrong, issue a firm, sharp “No”. If the puppy doesn’t stop, place him in his crate for a “timeout”. If you are not using a crate, have a timeout spot in which he can be placed.

The Leash – Although your new pup will spend most of his days lumbering behind you, he must still get used to walking on a leash so that he walks well in public places. And to make sure that you are walking him and not the other way around. The collar should fit just snug enough to fit two fingers between the collar and his neck.

Use a leash of appropriate length or a retractable version. Hold the leash on your left (the “heel” position) and walk slowly. A puppy Cocker Spaniel has short legs and doesn’t possess that trademark speed and agility yet, so go slow. Keep him close to your leg without letting him get under your feet. Give sufficient lead or restraint to keep him in place.

Obedience Training

Every dog should know the basic obedience skill set. You can choose to tackle basic obedience training on your own or go off to obedience classes with your Cocker. If this is your first foray into training a puppy (or dog) it may be worth the reasonable fee (around \$15 US per week for a 6 week session) to attend. You will gain confidence and skills you can use to train on your own for the next puppy or dog you bring home.

Your vet or AKC or other club can refer you to a reputable school. There will be classes for basic obedience, advanced socialization classes for enjoying a sidewalk café (while you go inside to order and he stays outside), and special classes for show-dog handling and perhaps other classes to suit specific needs, just ask.

Basic Commands

Sit, Stay and Come are your basic commands and the foundation of a well-disciplined dog. A well behaved dog won’t just impress your friends and family, it will make doing daily tasks like feeding and bedtime much easier. There is a number of training theories that say to use treats, not to use treats, use toys, use praise, and on and on. The main goal is to get the dog to do what you want him to do so don’t stress over this small detail. Use what works.

As a general rule of dog training, sessions should always be short (approximately five to 10 minutes) and they should always end on a positive note.

Sit

The goal is for the dog to put his butt on the floor with his head up looking at you whenever you say 'sit'. Your Cocker should already know and respond to his name (if not, read the first *Basic Training* lesson).

1. Use a calm voice, call your dog by his name and show your dog a treat or toy that it loves.
2. While the dog is standing show and hold the treat close to the dog's nose and then move it just above its head while moving the treat slowly backwards. The dog should naturally get into the sit position. As its legs are bending say 'sit'.
3. The very second the dog sits, give him the reward and enthusiastically say 'Good dog!'
4. If the dog does the wrong thing don't give any reward and don't fret, just try again.
5. Keep this up until the dog has mastered the exercise. Then continue the training with varying levels of distraction.
6. Slowly decrease the food rewards and substitute with enthusiastic praise.

Another method is to have the dog on a leash, issue the sit command and simultaneously push down on his rear with a gentle pull up on the collar. Issue praise as though he did it all on his own. If you follow the procedures above this latter method should only be necessary if your Cocker simply isn't getting it. After he performs on-leash, remove and try again.

You may also use hand signals which can be helpful when your dog is at a distance. If you (both of you) get really good, you may even be able to stop him in his tracks with a sit command if he tries to run off.

Stay

Of the three basic commands, this is arguably the most difficult because your dog will want to follow you any time you move away. When taught correctly, 'stay' could save your dog's life and is a hallmark of a well-mannered dog. It could save his life if you have to quickly issue the command to keep him from running into a busy street.

Once your dog has mastered "sit" the next step is the "stay" command. Stay assumes that your dog will maintain his position (sitting, laying, or standing) until you release him. Without the stay, you are only asking your dog to touch the ground with his butt and to get right back up. You cannot issue the stay command and expect to leave the room. At least initially, you should only expect a few moments delay before you give a treat and release.

1. Start by having the dog sit.
2. Before you give a treat, issue the "stay" command and hold your hand up.
3. When the dog attempts to stand up or move, issue a sharp "No".
4. Once your dog is successful at waiting for the treat, begin to take a single step to one side, and then back, followed by a reward.
5. If your dog moves, you've probably asked for too much, too soon; do a shorter stay or stop for now.

Once mastered, you can eventually try bold actions like sitting on the floor, walking around him in circles or clapping your hands. Follow each step by a reward and increase the distance. Gradually, your dog should enjoy and comply with the command. When you're ready to release him, issue an "Okay" or other command.

Come

One would think this is the easiest command since as noted in the “stay” command; your Cocker will want to follow you anyway and most dogs will head straight for any welcoming act. The trick, however, is to get your dog to come to you when something more intriguing has captured his attention. This is also a good command that can be used to keep your dog out of harms way.

Most dogs learn quickly that they can run faster than you—and that it’s much more fun to run free than to stay by your side (no offense).

Your dog shouldn’t be given freedom until he’s proven his dependability at coming when called. Until then, you might limit off-leash time to places where you don’t need to call him back, such as a fenced backyard.

1. You might want to start from the “stay” command with the dog at a fair distance.
2. Cheerfully shout, “Tiger, COME!” It may help to move backward a few feet. If this doesn’t work, try “Tiger, come, good boy,” praising him before he even comes so that he knows he’s not in trouble.
3. Reward him for coming and start over, increasing your distance slightly.
4. If your dog seems to be losing interest, stop the session after an easy success.
5. Gradually increase your distance and, eventually, add distractions.

Once your Cocker performs all of the commands well you might venture out to a park or other new venue.

Lying Down

Your final basic command is “Down”. You may have to distinguish between “down” for lying down and “down” for get down, when jumping up. You can either use “No” for the latter case, or another word for lying such as “Lay”.

1. Start from the sit position.
2. Slowly pull his front legs forward while saying “down”.
3. If your dog resists, issue a sharp “No” and continue the move or push down gently on his shoulders, if necessary.
4. Once down, keep the dog in place for as long as possible, up to one minute.
5. Repeat until the move is smooth and the down time is increased and you are satisfied with the results.

Heel

Heel is optional but is a required skill in obedience trials. If you don’t plan on participating in formal competition you may be perfectly satisfied with your dog simply walking on his leash without pulling or lagging.

However, if you've both done well with your basic training, you may wish to give "heel" a shot. Heeling means the dog walks on your left with his head about the same distance forward as your knees. Unlike simply walking on a leash, "heel" doesn't permit your dog to sniff around or otherwise stray past your knees. You have to be reasonable and allow bathroom breaks but use the "heel" command to return him to position.

1. Just to instill confidence and a positive base from which to start, first perform the commands your dog already knows.
2. With a leash on your dog, hold the end in your right hand. Grab the other end of the leash near the collar in your left hand and begin a brisk walk, issuing a sharp command to "heel".
3. If your dog lags behind, pull gently on the leash to bring his head even with your knee. Don't drag him.
4. If your dog runs ahead, pull back lightly while giving the "heel" command.

This command will require absolute calm and patience on your part because this is a tough command for your dog to learn; it will take a while for him to distinguish between walking at your knee versus walking several inches in front or behind. Once mastered, you can try off-leash.

Training for Hunting Dogs

The skills used in hunting are also required in obedience trials. These exercises can be difficult to master so you may wish to seek professional training or be prepared to practice patience. We will only cover the basics in this discussion. In today's world, the English Cocker Spaniel is used more for hunting than the American, which has primarily become a house pet.

Retrieve

Cockers can learn to retrieve fairly easily, which is good since they are used for hunting, you wouldn't want your evening meal lost in a thicket. As you may recall from the *History* chapter, one of the Cocker's original tasks was to flush game. Once flushed he would sit and wait for the shot so he could retrieve the prey. In obedience trials you won't be shooting wild game to demonstrate this skill, you will most likely use a generic object.



A Tri-color Cocker with a retrieved partridge

Relinquish

Obviously after the game is flushed, it needs to be retrieved. This is a great skill for an dog that might pick up something like a shoe, a chicken bone or other undesirable item. It also makes

fetch a lot more fun when he willingly relinquishes the ball instead of having to wrench it from his clenched jaws.

Hurdles

At first blush it may seem more like fun than work to jump hurdles, but a hunting Cocker will need this skill to jump bushes, boulders and other objects to do its job. This may be a tough one for your Cocker to master and will require persistence on both your parts.

Training Older Dogs

Older dogs will come with formed personalities and pre-existing habits. Some of these habits may be good—like already being house trained (whoopee!), and some may be bad—like chewing anything that doesn't move.

Your older dog may have quirks that you can't figure out. Others such as being "hand-shy" most likely means your Cocker was hit by hand a great deal. Most behaviors of habit can be unlearned with a lot of patience and a little extra understanding. Uncontrollable urges like anxious wetting as a result of being yelled at or feeling insecure and may never go away completely.

The old saying that "you can't teach an old new tricks" is simply not true, it just might take a bit longer.

Housetraining Your Cocker Spaniel

You should begin housetraining your puppy as soon as he arrives home, with the first stop being the designated area you selected (either outside or inside on papers). A young puppy does not have full sphincter muscle control, so puppies are not able to hold their bladder and bowel movements for very long periods of time, this will come with maturity.

The rate at which your puppy is housetrained is directly related to your consistency in feeding, sleeping, and exercising him. Still, every dog learns at a different rate, Cockers in particular can be a bit slow in this area. It takes some dogs only a few weeks to learn, while others may take several months. This will be an ultimate test of your patience, consistency and sense of humor.

Methods of Housetraining

There are three basic methods for housetraining your Cocker: paper training, crate training, and outdoor training. Ask 10 people, including professionals for an opinion on the best method and you'll probably get 10 different answers. Which one you choose may be largely influenced by your living situation. There's also the litter pan as an alternate method for puppies and small dogs.

For example, if you're on the 30th floor of a high rise building, paper (or wee wee pads) will be your method of choice, with the grass way down below being an occasional retreat. Although as

the puppy matures into a dog he may one day wait for the elevator ride but it's up to you to get him down there as soon as possible after waking, eating and before going to bed.

Regardless of which method you choose, training should begin around 8½ weeks of age. This is when a puppy is most open to learning and is gaining bladder control.

Paper Training

If you live in a home with easy access to the outdoors you might shoot straight for outdoor training so there's no transition period of having to move the paper outside but if you'll be away for long hours this might not be practical.

When training on paper you should have a small stack of newspaper spread on a flooring surface that's easy to clean, like linoleum or tile. The kitchen, bath or laundry rooms are likely choices, just make sure that the potty area is sufficiently distant from his sleeping area because he will not want to eliminate in his living quarters.

1. Confine the puppy to the designated bathroom area until it uses the paper.
2. Once he uses the paper, offer praise and remove the soiled top layer and add more clean sheets underneath so the next sheet moves to the top. This way the next top sheet has the scent and will help your puppy locate the spot again.
3. If he misses the paper, get the urine smell on a piece of newspaper and place it on top of the stack. Thoroughly clean the odor from the accident spot so he doesn't get confused between the scents.

Puppies have to eliminate every few hours, not just after waking, eating, or playing. Look for the telltale signs of sniffing the ground and searching for the "right place". If he's not headed for the papers, scoop him up and take him there, offering praise when the mission is accomplished.

Crate Training

Crate training can be easier than paper training because the crate is his "den" and he will naturally not want to soil this area, especially if you set up the crate as described in the *Making a Home* chapter. He may have to have an accident or two in the crate before he decides he'd rather hold it than sleep in it. While crate training is more passive on your part since it really just entails leaving him in there between meals and playtime, until he learns not to soil himself, you will need to get him outside as soon as you let him out of the crate.

You should establish a regular schedule and stick to it, he will learn to wait and be better able to "hold it" as he matures. In time, you will be able to leave the door open so he can retreat to the crate when he wants rest or comfort and can freely exit when it's time to go according to the schedule you've already established.

It might be hard, but try to not think of the crate as punishment and don't feel sorry for your crated pup. Remember, it's his den, a place of refuge.

Crating Times

A general guideline for the length of time your Cocker should be crated is one hour for each month of age, plus one until he reaches adulthood. So, an 8 week old puppy should be crated for no more than 3 hours at a time (2 months old x 1 hour +1). Even when able to remain in longer, no dog should be left in a crate all day. They need stimulation, exercise and social time. You want the crate to be a home, not a prison.

Keep it inviting by leaving the door open when he's not in it and having some his chew toys inside. Once completely trained, the door can be left open allowing the dog to exit and enter freely.

Outdoor Training

As noted earlier, outdoor training begins before your Cocker ever steps paw inside the house. Walk him to the designated potty spot and give him a few minutes to wander. If he happens to go, praise him with fervor. You should take a puppy outside every three to four hours but watch for signs that he's hunting for a place to go.

There may be several false alarms on your part because he'll probably be doing a lot of exploration sniffing just getting to know his new home, but it is best to err in the side of caution. Some Cockers may housetrain faster than others, you should notice progress within just a few weeks but by six months of age they are able to hold it for as long as nine hours, like adults.

The Litter Pan

It's not just for cats anymore! The litter pan is a relatively new idea for training dogs and can come in quite handy in apartments and other places where quick yard access isn't available. It can also be helpful when traveling or visiting unfamiliar places.

The basic concept of litter pan training is the same as with paper training. To make the pan more appealing to your puppy, place a shred of newspaper with his urine on it in the pan. He will be drawn by his scent just as with paper training.

Follow the same three steps listed under the paper training section.

For even better odor control and a clean environment, try the specially formulated dog litter products from Purina. Check out the Resources section for more information.

Training Older Dogs

If you are bringing an older dog into your home that has not yet been housetrained, it may be more of a challenge. Older dogs already have developed their habits, so it will take time to retrain him. However, it can be done!

All of the lessons below can be applied to both the younger and older dog. It may just take longer with the older dog, so be patient.

Additionally, older dogs eliminate fewer times than puppies throughout the day, so you have fewer opportunities in the day to train him.

Command Phrase

You might want to assign a command phrase to the act of “going,” which will prove quite useful when it’s cold or rainy outside. Select a command phrase like “Hurry up” or “Go pee” and use it as the dog begins to go. If you have the luxury of letting your Cocker out unattended in a fenced yard, you might say “Do you want to go outside” or “Do you want to go potty?” when you open the door to let him out. Use this same phrase every time you take or let him outside. Upon finishing his business, offer up praise.

Cleaning Up

When your dog has an accident in the house, clean up as soon as possible with a solution made for getting rid of pet odors and stains. Carpets will require more diligence and deep cleaning because the odor will seep into the fibers, but there are a number of effective products to sufficiently do the job.

You should also clean up your puppy’s messes outside too, even in your own yard. A clean environment is important for your Cocker’s health (and your grass too). Piles of feces on the lawn not only look and smell bad, but they can spread disease. Many public parks make it easy by providing sanitary mitts for picking up poop, so there’s no reason not to be courteous and pick up after your pet.





Advanced Boot Camp: Behavior Problems

Behavioral Problems

Even with knowledgeable breeding, good socialization and diligent training on your part, some dogs may still exhibit behavioral problems. Or, you may adopt an older dog in which case you may inherit problems. Fortunately, most of them can be resolved with a little bit of re-training.

Here we discuss the most common behavior problems a Cocker Spaniel might experience and what you can do to handle them.

Jumping Up

Why dogs jump up on people is under debate. Most believe that it is because they are happy and excited to see us and that it is their way of showing and receiving affection. Others believe it is a sign of dominance.

Regardless of why any particular dog jumps, what was once cute as a puppy is probably annoying at the least and embarrassing at the worst when finely dressed guests are the target.

Jumping is usually learned while a puppy. When our pups are small and fuzzy we usually sit on the floor, let them wiggle into our laps and allow them to lick and nuzzle up close to our face. When they come bounding over to greet us, jumping and stretching up to our knees, we bend down to pick them up and exchange hugs and kisses.

This seemingly innocuous behavior on our part inadvertently rewards the puppy for jumping. Hence, we unwittingly contributed to the problem and now we have to undo it.

What You Can Do

Although it seems counterintuitive, one of the best methods for teaching your dog not to jump is to ignore him. As you will read again and again in this section, even reprimanding your dog for certain behaviors provides him with attention, he doesn't care if it's negative or positive attention.

When you enter the front door and Sport jumps on you to say hello, do not acknowledge him in any way. Do not make eye contact, do not talk, do not reprimand. Nothing. What you are doing is signaling your Cocker that YOU are the boss and are not acknowledging him right now. After a couple of jumps he will sit down or go to his bed. Then you can acknowledge and release him from his sit.

This can be difficult especially if your dog jumps hard, but it will work and usually within just a few sessions.

Other methods you might try include:

1. Give your dog an alternative method of greeting you and others. Teach him to sit-stay. He cannot sit-stay and jump up at the same time. When he is sitting you can then kneel down and give him a warm hug and kiss. Practice coming and going for 10-15 minutes per day, maybe more depending on your dog's tolerance level.
2. Teach the 'Off' command. First, get your dog to put his front feet up on your lap. Praise him for a job well done. Then say "Off" in a firm, but gentle, voice and stand up. If you prefer, use your hands to put his paws on the floor. Either one is fine. Praise and pet him some more while he is sitting nicely. Practice until he begins to understand.
3. For an adolescent dog at or over 6 months of age, a leash training method can be very effective. This requires two people, and a dog trained to sit on command. One person has the dog on a collar and short leash. The other person approaches the dog. As soon as the dog begins to jump up the handler tightens the leash and commands the dog to 'sit'.

Both people then reward the dog for sitting and not jumping up. This will work best if your dog is good at his basic commands, but as with all training, keep practicing. This method combines method #2 above so you can effectively train your Cocker to sit when greeting a person, while also preventing a jump up.

4. Fold your arms in front of you, turn away from him and say, "off." Continue to turn away until all four paws are on the ground, then quietly praise him. Issue the 'sit' command and praise him while in the sitting position.

If he jumps up again when you begin to praise him, simply turn away and repeat the above.

No matter which method you choose, once your puppy realizes that he gets attention when he stops jumping on you and sits instead, he'll stop jumping up.

You should engage family and friends to help by explaining to them what you want them to do when they enter your home. This helps your dog learn the same thing consistently and learn it regardless of whether the person coming through the door is family or a guest.

Nipping/Biting

When puppies play with each other they use their mouths. Hence, puppies usually want to bite or “mouth” your hands when being petted or playing with you. This behavior is rarely aggressive and is not intended to cause harm.

This is normal puppy behavior but you will still want to redirect your puppy's attention to something else in case the nipping gets hard. Your goal is to teach that putting teeth on skin is never acceptable.

What You Can Do

Start by encouraging acceptable behavior. Redirect your puppy's chewing toward acceptable objects by offering him a small rawhide or other type of chew toy whenever you pet him. This technique can be especially effective when children want to pet or play with your dog.

As you reach out to scratch him with one hand, offer the chew bone with the other. This will not only help your puppy learn that people and petting are wonderful, but will also keep his mouth busy while he's being petted.

Alternate which hand does the petting and which one has the chew bone. At first, you may need to pet or scratch your puppy for short periods of time since the longer he's petted, the more likely he is to get excited and start to nip.

While teaching the positive, you also need to discourage unacceptable behavior by letting your dog know that nipping removes all attention and social interaction with you.

As soon as you feel teeth on your skin, yelp, “OUCH” in a high-pitched voice, then ignore him for a few minutes. Then, try the chew toy and petting method again. It may take many repetitions for your puppy to understand what's expected but he will eventually get it.

Heal Nipping

To stop nipping at your heels, try carrying a spray bottle filled with water or a heavily-diluted mixture of vinegar and water. The ratio should be 1 part vinegar to 8 parts water. When the puppy follows you and nips at your heels, loudly say “No” and spray him in the face with the water solution.

If the puppy is simply overexcited, try returning him to his crate for 30 minutes to calm down. The crate should not be used as a punishment, just a place to relax and calm down. When the puppy is calm, bring him back out. Start by taking the puppy for a walk or outside to run for a while before petting or engaging the puppy. Offer him a toy before the opportunity to bite presents itself.

Avoid any games that involve biting or nipping - such as chase, tug of war, holding toys in the air for the puppy to jump to, or any other bite associated games until the puppy is more mature and can distinguish between your hand and the toy.

Excessive Barking

Dogs communicate through barking just as people do through talking. And while it is perfectly normal behavior, just like some people talk too much, some dogs may bark too much. Excessive barking or barking at inappropriate times *can* be corrected. It is easier to correct a puppy than it is to retrain an adult barker but the latter can be done with some work.

Why Dogs Bark Excessively

- Confinement in a home, yard, or kennel.
- To attract attention because he is lonely or bored.
- Dogs that are not exercised enough bark to release tension.
- Some dogs are hypersensitive to every sound or movement around them.
- Growing up he may have learned to bark excessively because his owner inadvertently reinforced the behavior either by ignoring the dog because it simply didn't strike the owner as annoying. Other times, the dog may have been encouraged because of approaching strangers or, the dog was yelled at, which is still attention.

When correcting excessive or inappropriate barking keep in mind the three main goals:

1. To reduce the number of barks per session.
2. To eliminate situations that cause the barking.
3. Increase the length of the quiet times between barking sessions.

It is obviously not reasonable to eliminate barking altogether; after all you do still want him to sound the alarm in the case of pending danger.

What You Can Do

There are some basic training techniques that can be done to reduce excessive barking.

If you succeeded in Basic Training, your Cocker already knows you're the boss. Add the command "Stop Barking" to your repertoire. Do not physically punish him for barking, dogs do not relate punishment, after the fact, to a previous act. Plus, unless he's a Malamute—and a Cocker is not—he's supposed to bark, you just want to control it.

Praise him when he is not barking. It may seem silly, but praising silence works, especially if the dog is quiet at a time that might normally set off a barking jag, such as when someone walks past your house minding her own business.

Whenever your dog is just lying around being quiet, say, "Good Dog!" If he begins to bark, after the third or fourth alarm bark, say, "Stop Barking!" When he stops, command him to "sit" and follow it up with a "Good Dog!" In other words, give a verbal reprimand for excessive barking and follow it up with a command and then praise, telling him what you want him to do instead.

Absentee Barking

If he barks in the house after you leave, change the way you depart. Without fanfare simply give your goodbye phrase and walk out.

If he is already a heavy barker, start with the above retraining program. Use a deliberate set-up by leaving and quietly returning to see if he is barking. If he is not barking, go into the house and praise him. If he is barking, issue the "Stop Barking" command and have him sit. Leave again. You will probably have to repeat this a number of times but as with all training be persistent. Do not give up!

Separation Anxiety

Dogs with separation anxiety exhibit this behavior when they're left alone. Typically, they'll have a dramatic anxiety response within 20-45 minutes after their owners leave them. The most common of these behaviors are:

- Digging, chewing and scratching at doors or windows in an attempt to escape and reunite with their owners.
- Howling, barking and crying in an attempt to get their owner to return.
- Urination and defecation (even with housetrained dogs) as a result of distress.

Why Dogs Suffer From Separation Anxiety

It's not fully known exactly why some dogs suffer from separation anxiety and, under similar circumstances, others don't. It's important to realize that the destruction and house soiling that often occur with separation anxiety are not the dog's attempt to punish or seek revenge on his owner for leaving him alone, but are actually part of a panic response.

Separation anxiety sometimes occurs when:

- A dog has never or rarely been left alone so when it begins to happen he panics.
- Following a long interval, such as a vacation, during which the owner and dog are constantly together.
- After a traumatic event (from the dog's point of view) such as a period of time spent at a shelter or boarding kennel.
- After a change in the family's routine or structure (a child leaving for college, a change in work schedule, a move to a new home, a new pet or person in the home).

How to Know if Your Dog Has Separation Anxiety

Because there are many reasons for the behaviors associated with separation anxiety, it's essential to correctly diagnose the reason for the behavior before proceeding with treatment. If most, or all, of the following statements are true about your dog, he may have a separation anxiety problem:

- The behavior occurs exclusively or primarily when he's left alone.
- The behavior always occurs when he's left alone, regardless of the length of time.
- He follows you from room to room whenever you're home.
- He reacts with excitement, depression or anxiety to your preparations to leave the house.
- He displays effusive, frantic greeting behaviors.
- He dislikes spending time outdoors by himself.

What You Can Do

For a minor separation anxiety problem, the following techniques may be helpful by themselves. For more severe problems, these techniques should be used along with the desensitization process described in the next section.

- Keep arrivals and departures low-key. For example, when you arrive home, ignore your dog for the first few minutes, then calmly pet him. This is similar to the technique used to stop jumping.
- Leave your dog with an article of clothing that smells like you such as an old T-shirt that you've slept in recently.
- Establish a "departure cue"—a word or action that you use every time you leave that tells your dog you'll be back. Dogs usually learn to associate certain cues with the absences by their owners. Just as you learned to have a cue for when you're leaving the house for the day, you should have a "Be Right Back" command.
- If your dog engages in destructive chewing as part of his separation distress leave him some chewing toys. Since he will be unsupervised very hard rubber toys or Nylabone products are good choices.

What Not to Do

- Punishment is not an effective way to treat separation anxiety. In fact, punishment may actually increase his separation anxiety.
- Getting another pet. This usually doesn't help an anxious dog as his anxiety is the result of his separation from you, not merely the result of being alone.
- Crating your dog. Your dog will still engage in anxiety responses in the crate. He may urinate, defecate, howl or even injure himself in an attempt to escape from the crate.

- Leave the radio on (unless the radio is used as a “safety cue” - see above).
- Obedience school. While obedience training is always a good idea, it won’t directly help a separation anxiety problem. Separation anxiety is not the result of disobedience or lack of training, it’s a panic response.

What to Do for More Severe Cases of Separation Anxiety

The primary treatment for more severe cases of separation anxiety is a systematic process of getting your dog used to being alone. You must teach your dog to remain calm during “practice” departures and short absences. The following is one recommendation:

- Begin by acting out your normal departure activities (getting your keys, putting on your coat), then sit back down. Repeat this step until your dog shows no distress in response to your activities.
- Next, engage in your normal departure activities and go to the door and open it, but instead of leaving, sit back down.
 - Next, step outside the door and leaving the door open, return. You may want to do this with an interior door such as the door between the house and garage if your Cocker tends to run off.
 - Finally, step outside, close the door, and then immediately return. You are getting your dog accustomed to being alone with the door closed between you for several seconds.
 - Proceed gradually from step to step, repeating each step until your dog shows no signs of distress (the number of repetitions will vary depending on the severity of the problem).

If at any time in this process your actions produce an anxiety response in your dog, you’ve proceeded too fast. Return to an earlier step in the process and repeat until the dog shows no distress, then proceed to the next step.

- When your dog tolerates your being on the other side of the door for several seconds, begin short-duration absences. Give a verbal cue (for example, “I’ll be back.”), leave and return within a minute.

Your return must be low-key: either ignore your dog or greet him quietly and calmly. If he shows no signs of distress, repeat the exercise. If he appears anxious, wait until he relaxes to repeat the exercise. Gradually increase the length of time you’re gone.

- Practice as many absences as possible within a 10-minute period. You can do many departures within one session if your dog relaxes sufficiently between departures. You should also scatter practice departures and short-duration absences throughout the day.

- Once your dog can handle short absences of 30 to 90 minutes, he should be able to handle longer intervals alone so that you won't have to work up to all-day absences minute by minute.

How long it takes to condition your dog to being alone depends on the severity of his problem. If this fails or it seems to be taking too long for your Cocker to respond, try these interim solutions.

Interim Solutions

Because the treatments described above can take some time, meanwhile your home is being destroyed; the following suggestions may be helpful in dealing with the problems in the short term:

- Speak with your veterinarian about the possibility of drug therapy. A good anti-anxiety drug should not sedate your dog, but simply reduce his anxiety while you're gone. This is not a permanent solution, however, and should be used in conjunction with behavior modification techniques.
- Take your dog to doggie day care or a similar facility where your dog might enjoy the company of other dogs.
- Leave your dog with a friend, family member or hire a pet sitter.

Chewing

Normal play behavior can result in destruction as it may involve digging, chewing, shredding and/or shaking toy-like objects. Dogs don't have hands so it is natural that they explore the world with their mouths. This exploration can lead to destructive chewing. However, chewing can be redirected onto appropriate items so your dog is not destroying items of value.

Be realistic. Your dog will, at some point chew up something you value. This is often part of the transition to a new home. Chewing is normal teething and investigative behavior; however, dogs will engage in destructive behavior for a variety of reasons. In order to deal with the behavior, you must first determine why your dog is being destructive.

Your dog may be chewing for entertainment if:

- He's left alone for long time periods without opportunities for interaction with you or other family members.
- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.
- He doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's a particularly active type of dog like your sporting Cocker Spaniel, who needs an active lifestyle to be well-adjusted.

Until he has learned what he can and cannot chew, it is your responsibility to manage the situation as much as possible, removing the opportunity to chew on unacceptable objects.

Take Responsibility

- First, take responsibility for your own belongings. If you don't want it in your dog's mouth, don't leave it lying around.
- Keep clothing, shoes, books, magazines, eyeglasses, cell phones and remote controls out of your dog's reach.
- Don't confuse your dog by offering him old shoes or socks as toys. He won't know the difference between the good ones and the bad ones. Your dog's toys should be obviously different from household items.
- Until he learns the house rules, confine him when you are unable to keep an eye on him. Choose a dog proof place with fresh water and "safe" toys. If your dog is crate trained, you may also crate him for short periods of time.
- Spend plenty of time with your Cocker. Your dog won't know how to behave if he's always kept in the house or yard by himself.
- Take your dog to an obedience class to teach him important commands, like "leave it." Classes may have the added benefit of reducing destructive behavior because they will help your dog burn off some excess energy.
- If, and only if, you actually catch your dog chewing on something he shouldn't, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise and offer him a replacement chew toy instead. Praise him lavishly when he takes the toy in his mouth.

What You Can Do

- Play with your dog daily. If you don't have a yard, a tennis court can be a good place to play. Fetch is a great game that will use up your dog's excess energy without wearing you out in the process.
- Go for a walk. Walks should be more than just potty break. Be sure to allow time for sniffing, exploring, instruction and praise.
- Increase your dog's opportunities for mental stimulation. Teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks and practice them daily. If you have time, take an obedience class.
- Provide your dog with lots of toys.
- Keep your dog's toy supply fresh by rotating them. No matter how smart he is, a hidden toy that suddenly emerges is a "new" experience. New toys are always more interesting than old ones.
- Try different kinds of toys, but when you introduce a new toy, watch your dog to make sure he won't tear it up or ingest the pieces.
- Consider putting tidbits of food inside chew toys. Your dog will focus his chewing on these toys instead of on unacceptable objects.
- Consider a good doggie day care program for two or three days a week to work off some of your dog's excess energy.

What Not To Do

Punishment is rarely effective in resolving destructive behavior problems and can even make them worse. Never discipline your dog after-the-fact. People often believe their dog makes the connection between an act done hours ago and a punishment done now because he runs and hides or “looks guilty.”

Dogs don't feel guilt; rather they display submissive postures like cowering, running away or hiding when they feel threatened by an angry tone of voice, body posture or facial expression.

Your dog doesn't know that he's done something wrong; he only knows that you're upset. Punishment after-the-fact will not only fail to eliminate the undesirable behavior, it may provoke other undesirable behaviors, so only scold him when he's caught red-pawed.

Digging

Dogs don't dig out of spite, revenge or a desire to destroy your yard or belongings. It is a natural behavior that can sometimes go awry. Making the area where the dog digs unappealing may be effective, but it's likely that he'll just begin digging in other locations or display other unacceptable behavior, such as chewing or barking.

A more effective approach is to address the cause of the digging. Digging may occur for any number of reasons including:

- Seeking entertainment
- Seeking prey
- Seeking comfort or protection
- Seeking attention
- Seeking escape

We will look at each of these possibilities in depth and offer suggestions for handling them.

Seeking Entertainment

Your dog may be digging for entertainment if:

- He's left alone in the yard for long periods of time without opportunities for interaction with you.
- His environment is relatively barren, without playmates or toys.
- He doesn't have other outlets for his energy.
- He's the type of dog (like a terrier) that is bred to dig as part of his “job”
- He's a herding or sporting breed, like your Cocker who needs an active job to be happy.

- He's imitating your gardening or other digging activity.

What You Can Do

- Walk your dog regularly. It's good exercise mentally and physically.
- Teach your dog to fetch and practice with him as often as possible.
- Teach your dog a few commands and/or tricks. Practice these commands/tricks every day for at least five to 10 minutes.
- Take an obedience class with your dog and practice daily what you've learned.
- Keep interesting toys in the yard to keep your dog busy even when you're not around (Kong, Nylaprene or busy-box toys are good choices).
- If your dog is a hardcore digger and you have the space, provide an "acceptable digging area." Choose an area of the yard where it's okay for him to dig. Cover the area with loose soil or sand.

If you catch your dog digging in an unacceptable area, interrupt the behavior with a loud noise, say, "No Dig" and take the dog to his designated digging area. When he digs in the approved spot, reward him with praise. Make the unacceptable digging spots unattractive (at least temporarily) by setting sharp rocks or chicken wire into the dirt.

Seeking Prey

Dogs may pursue burrowing animals or insects that live in—or under—your yard. Sporting breeds and others that are trained to 'hunt up' game may be particularly predisposed to this problem.

Your dog may be pursuing prey if:

- The digging is in a very specific area.
- The digging is at the roots of trees or shrubs
- The digging is in a somewhat organized layout, as if a rodent were furrowing tunnels below the lawn.

What You Can Do

Search for possible signs of pests and then rid your yard of them. Hire professionals if necessary and avoid methods that could be toxic or dangerous.

Seeking Comfort or Protection

In adverse weather conditions dogs may dig holes to lie in to either get cool, warm or for protection.

Your dog may be digging for protection or comfort if:

- The holes are near foundations of buildings, large shade trees or a water source.
- Your dog doesn't have a shelter or his shelter is exposed to the hot sun or cold winds.
- You find evidence that your dog is lying in the holes he digs.

What You Can Do

- Provide a well-constructed doghouse. See Chapter 6.
- Your dog may still prefer a hole in the ground, in which case you can try the "approved digging area" suggestion described above.
- Provide plenty of fresh water in a bowl that can't be tipped over in case he's digging for water.

Seeking Attention

Any behavior can become an attempt to gain attention if the dog learns he can receive even negative attention for engaging in the behavior.

Your dog may be digging to get attention if:

- He digs in your presence.
- Time spent with you is limited.

What You Can Do

Simply ignore the behavior. Don't give your dog attention for digging (remember, even punishment is attention). Make sure you spend sufficient time with your dog on a daily basis so that he doesn't have to resort to misbehaving to get your attention.

Seeking Escape

Dogs may escape to get to something, to get somewhere or to get away from something. Your dog may be digging to escape if:

- He digs along or under the fence line

What You Can Do

- Bury chicken wire at the base of the fence with sharp edges rolled under.
- Place large rocks, partially buried, along the bottom of the fence line.
- Bury the bottom of the fence one to two feet under the ground.

Eating-Related Problems

If your Cocker seems unable or disinterested in eating it could be due to either health or psychological issues. For the most part, however, dogs with eating disorders are either eating the wrong diet or are not receiving sufficient exercise. Many owners feed their dogs excessive

amounts of table scraps, human treats, and other items that are simply not healthy for dogs to consume. Some of these items, such as chocolate or onion, may in fact cause toxicity in dogs and can lead to death in some cases. See more on this in the chapter on Foods to Avoid.

Dental Problems

Some eating disorders marked by rapid weight loss and a disinterest in food may be due to poor dental condition or painful gums. If it hurts a dog to eat, it is less likely that they will consume as much food, especially if you feed primarily dry or hard kibble. Check the dog's teeth and gums for any signs of disease, bleeding or swelling. Take your Cocker to the vet as soon as possible if you suspect gum disease. Try changing to a softer dog food until the vet has the problem under control.

Lack of Exercise

Dogs can become lazy and more sedate as they age. If your Cocker has slowed down due to aging, you may need to adjust his food intake accordingly to prevent obesity. Obesity in dogs is not a healthy condition, and can complicate respiratory, circulatory and other body systems.

Try encouraging your dog to exercise more, play fetch or Frisbee, or just take regular walks together.

Pica

Pica is the name of a medical condition where the dog attempts to eat inorganic or non-food items. This is more than just chewing, as the dog actually chews and swallows the item. It may be caused by a chemical imbalance, a nutrient, vitamin or mineral deficiency, or a nervous or psychological condition. A veterinarian can perform blood tests to determine if there is a medical reason for the behavior. Adjusting the dog's environment and diet may be required to correct this problem.

Coprophagia (Poop Eating)

Coprophagia is the formal term for eating feces, whether it's his own or that of another animal. As you learned in the chapter on breeding, nursing females naturally consume their puppies' feces to keep the whelping box clean. Why other dogs do it is really somewhat of a mystery. Some of theories include:

- To get attention from their owners
- From anxiety, stress, or being punished
- From boredom
- In an attempt to clean up in crowded conditions
- When dogs observe their owners picking up feces, and imitate this behavior (allelomimetic behavior).

- Because puppies taste everything and discover that feces are edible and perhaps, tasty.
- Because dogs are scavengers, and this is within the range of natural behavior.
- To prevent the scent from attracting predators.
- Because the texture and temperature of fresh feces approximates that of regurgitated food, which is how canine mothers in the wild would provide solid food.
- Because of high protein content in the feces (particularly cat feces) or, due to large concentrations of undigested matter in the feces.
- Due to assorted health problems, including:
 - Pancreatitis
 - Intestinal infections
 - Food allergies, creating mal-absorption
- Because they are hungry, such as when eating schedules are changed, or because they are not sufficiently absorbing nutrients.

Another theory proposes that carnivores sometimes eat the feces of their prey in order to ingest and exude scents which camouflage their own.

What You Can Do

First, visit your vet to rule out any of the medical conditions mentioned above. If the habit is behavioral the problem is treatable with any one, or a combination of several remedies.

1. All feces (your dog, cat, etc.) should be picked up immediately to prevent consumption.
2. Because boredom or inactivity can bring on the habit, exercise can help. As sporting dogs, Cocker in particular need a lot of exercise and mental stimulation to maintain health anyway, so this would be an added benefit.
3. Some veterinarians believe the behavior may be caused by B vitamin and vitamin K deficiency, which can be found in feces. See if your vet can suggest other ways to get these vitamins in your dog's diet.
4. Try feeding only dry kibble. Meaty diets could produce aromatic and tempting feces. In this case you should feed your Cocker a consistent, balanced diet with two or three short meals a day.
5. Try sprinkling the poop with hot sauce to make it unpalatable.
6. You might also try simple aversion therapy by letting the dog approach the stool on a long lead. If he starts sniffing it, give a strong leash check. If he passes by, praise him.

Several dog food companies produce food additives that can be added to the animal's food to make the feces taste bad so you may want to give these a try.

Summary

You will notice a common theme in all of the non-eating related behavior problems and that is boredom, lack of time with you and attention seeking. The good thing about that is that the solutions are also similar, so as you work on barking, you will also work on separation anxiety. The solutions for digging and chewing also share some commonalities, so if your Cocker exhibits multiple behaviors, you may be able to work through them together.

Diagnosing the underlying causes of these behaviors can be difficult so if you're still not sure what's going on with your dog, visit your vet and rule out medical or emotional conditions.





The Show Circuit

The World of Dog Shows

If you are looking forward to trying out the show circuit, this is the chapter you've been waiting for. Go ahead and read this chapter now but go back and start at the beginning where you will learn how to select a healthy puppy, keep him groomed, and train him; setting the foundation for what could be the next great champion.

Any purebred Cocker with pedigree papers and an AKC (KCGB, CCR) or other recognized registration, is eligible to compete in competitions that are suitable for judging Cocker Spaniels. To learn more about the rules of competing, contact the appropriate organization for the country in which you intend to compete. Just as each organization has Breed Standards (see chapter 3), they will also have eligibility requirements for competition.

Types of Competition

Let's face it, dog shows are like beauty pageants for dogs. In competition your Cocker Spaniel will be judged on his appearance, physique, bearing, temperament, and talent. Each dog is judged on how well it conforms to the breed standard, as compared to all other dogs in the competition. Dogs compete for points that count toward earning championship status.

If national competition is your goal you will probably want to gain experience by competing in local or specialized shows and work your way toward national (or international) competition.

The most common competitions are:

- **Conformation** – Conformation events are intended to evaluate breeding stock. These events range in size from specific-breed, local specialty club shows to large all-breed shows with over 3,000 competitors. The dog is judged on how well he “conforms” in overall appearance and structure to the standard. This is viewed as an indication of his ability to produce quality puppies.
- **Obedience Trials** – Obedience trials are intended to test your Cocker’s ability to perform a prescribed set of commands. Competition is at a Novice, Open, or Utility level with each level being more difficult. *Novice* exercises include the basic training commands such as sit, stay, and heel. A winner is awarded the status of Companion Dog (CD). *Open* exercises include the retrieve, jump and hurdle skills taught in hunting obedience. The winner is awarded the status of Companion Dog Excellent (CDX). *Utility* exercises are the most complicated and involve scent trials. A dog must win the Utility Dog (UD) title to earn points toward the Obedience Trial Championship title.
- **Agility** – Modeled on equestrian stadium competitions, agility trials require a dog to complete a series of activities such as jumps, tunnels and weave poles in an obstacle course within a certain period of time. This is also a test for the dog’s handler as he issues commands off-leash running from one activity to another. After earning both an Excellent Standard title and Excellent Jumpers title, a dog/handler team can compete for the Master Agility Champion title.
- **Hunting/Field Trials** – Because of their status as sporting dogs, Cocker Spaniels are automatically eligible for hunting and field trials. Field trials demonstrate the skills for which the breed was bred such as retrieving, jumping and hurdling. Winners are awarded Field Champion or Amateur Field Champion titles. Hunting titles are Junior, Senior, or Master Hunter.

Specialty competitions include:

- Canine Disc
- Flyball
- Tracking
- Schutzhund
- Lure Coursing/Racing
- Weight Pulling
- Herding
- Mushing
- Musical Freestyle

If you’re not interested in formal competition but would like to give it a try, many local clubs host non-competitive "Fun Matches" where you can both test your skill in the ring.

How a Dog Show Works

These are general descriptions and primarily reference AKC sanctioned shows. You should check the specific guidelines for any competition you wish to enter.

Each dog is presented to a judge by its handler. The handler can be the owner, a breeder or a hired professional. It is the handler's job to work the dog and issue the commands for each task in a trial.

Most dogs in competition at conformation shows are competing for points toward their AKC championships. It takes 15 points, including two majors (wins of three, four or five points) awarded by at least three different judges, to become an AKC "Champion of Record."

The number of championship points awarded at a show depends on the number of males and females of the breed in competition. The more entrants, the greater the number of points to be awarded. The maximum number of points a dog can earn in a single show is five.

Males and females compete separately within their respective breeds, in six regular classes.

Competition Classes

Puppy – For dogs between six and 12 months of age, that are not yet champions.

12-to-18 Months – For dogs in this age group that are not yet champions.

Novice – For dogs six months of age and over that have not won three first prizes in the Novice Class; a first prize in Bred-by-Exhibitor, American-bred or Open classes; nor any points toward their championship prior to the entry deadline.

Bred By Exhibitor – This is for dogs that are exhibited by their owner and breeder and are not yet champions.

American-Bred – For dogs mated and born in the United States who are not yet champions.

Open – For any dog of a given breed at least 6 months of age.

After these classes are judged, all the dogs that won first place in a class compete again to determine who is the best of the winning dogs. Males and females are again judged separately. Only the best male (Winners Dog) and the best female (Winners Bitch) receive championship points. The Winners Dog and Winners Bitch then compete with the champions for the Best of Breed award.



At the end of the Best of Breed Competition, three awards are usually given:

1. **Best of Breed** - the dog judged as the best in its breed category.
2. **Best of Winners** - the dog judged as the better of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch.
3. **Best of Opposite Sex** - the best dog that is the opposite sex to the Best of Breed winner.

Award Ribbons

Every athletic competition from grade school track to the Olympics awards its champions with a memento of their accomplishments. The dog show is no different. Each dog that receives an award is given a ribbon.

Ribbon Color

Blue - Awarded for first place in any regular class as well as to the winner of each group competition.

Red - Awarded for second place in each class as well as for second place in each group competition.

Yellow - Awarded for third place in each class as well as for third place in each group competition.

White - Awarded for fourth place in each class as well as for fourth place of each group competition.

Purple - Awarded to the winners of the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch classes. Since these are the classes in which championship points are earned, these ribbons are highly coveted.

Purple and White - Awarded to the Reserve Winners (The runners-up to the Winners Dog and Winners Bitch).

Blue and White - Awarded to the dog that wins Best of Winners.

Purple and Gold - Awarded to the dog judged "Best of Breed" in each breed competition. This is highly coveted because it allows advancement to the Group competition.

Red and White - Awarded to the Best of Opposite Sex.

Red, White and Blue - Only one of these is awarded at the end of each show. It is awarded to winner of Best In Show. How very American!

Best in Show

Best in Show is awarded to the only dog left undefeated at an all-breed show at the end of a judging day.

Only the Best of Breed winners advance to compete in the Group competitions. Each AKC-recognized breed falls into one of seven group classifications: Sporting (your Cocker), Hound, Working, Terrier, Toy, Non-Sporting and Herding. Four places are awarded in each group, but only the first-place winner advances to the Best In Show competition.





Understanding Your Cocker

It's Only Natural

Despite its sweet presence and an expression that often looks somber and serene when posed, the Cocker Spaniel still exhibits many of the traits of its long-lost wolf heritage. Your Cocker has several behaviors that will forever tie him to his ancient past.

Ranking Order

Ranking is the normal social order established within a dog pack as each individual animal exerts its dominance or submission. All pack dogs submit to the higher authority (the Alpha). This hierarchy keeps the peace among the pack and order in daily life activities.

You will see this dominance structure in your home especially if you have more than one dog. It's a simple fact of life with a dog that one will dominate the other, even if it's subtle. If you have an only dog, then you are the Alpha and should act accordingly (well, technically you are the Alpha regardless of how many dogs you have, but your Cocker won't be in a position to dominate over another dog). Once your dog recognizes you as the authority, his natural instincts will want to follow your training commands.

Marking

Your Cocker will instinctively mark the "hot spots" in your neighborhood to send a signal to all other dogs that this is *his* spot. The next dog passing by will probably mark over this spot to reclaim it and later in the day, your Cocker will do the same. If you have the opportunity to observe several dogs together in one place you may find it quite amusing when one dog pees, then another pees on top of that. Observe whether that is the last pee or whether the first dog (or yet another) comes to pee on top again. This could go back and forth for several passes.

Over-marking is another way to establish rank and usually he who pees last wins.

How Dogs Communicate

There's no doubt that dogs have a language. In fact, they are bilingual. They have a language that they speak among their species, and then there's the language that they speak to us and we to them. Canine communications are instinctive and universal; meaning your American or English Cocker speaks the same language as a Japanese Akita.

Through a series of physical expressions, barks, growls and the infamous butt-sniff, dogs transmit a multitude of information and emotions. From raised hackles that spell trouble to wagging tails that welcome play, dogs are in constant communication with one another.

You are having a conversation with your dog every time you issue a command, or he "asks" to go out to the bathroom, or he barks to warn of approaching strangers, or you peacefully coexist snuggled on one end of the sofa, or... well, you get it! Every interaction you have with your Cocker is a conversation and it will take time for each of you to learn what the other is saying.

There's nothing quite as wonderful as the day you realize you and your Cocker truly understand each other from the moment you first recognize his signal to go pee to his sitting the moment you request it. There may even be odd behaviors that only you understand, and those moments are even more special. It's a lot like when someone else's 2 year old child is uttering what sounds like gibberish to our ears, "Ma ah won a bobba wawa," but makes complete sense to the parent." If you didn't pick it up, that says "Mom, I want a bottle of water".

As with all relationships, good communication is the cornerstone of a happy, strong bond. Once you and your Cocker have established a language, life together should be merry.

Life Cycle

Your Cocker's life begins to change the moment you pick him up and take him away from his mother and littermates. He has been removed from his pack and the only life he's known for the first several weeks of his existence. Don't feel bad; in a matter of days, he will see you and others in his new home as his new pack once settled.

As mentioned in an earlier chapter, his initial socialization is formed by eight weeks of age, but from now on he is set for emotional and physical growth. This is why you want to start training from the moment you get home, he's eager to learn and now's your chance to teach him good habits.

Puppy Stage

By about 12 weeks of age, chewing will probably pick up because he will begin to lose his milk teeth (baby teeth) and get some serious chops. That means he'll need to test out the new teeth as he figures out textures, tastes and the chew factor of a variety of items.

Keep good chew toys on hand and remember to NEVER yell at or hit him. He's only growing up! If you are going to spay or neuter, you should do it as soon as your vet advises it's a good time.

Adolescence

Somewhere between seven and 10 months of age your Cocker will be at or near his full size. He will morph from curious pup to bold explorer. Unfortunately, this also means your Cocker is approaching the equivalent of a teenager and will begin to test his boundaries and your resolve by challenging the training he's already received.

To continue his positive growth gently but firmly remind him who's top dog (that's you).

Adulthood

At maturity—12 to 18 months—your Cocker's emotional development will pretty much be complete. If all went well during puppyhood and adolescence you should now both be on the easy side of enjoying life together.

Cockers & Kids

The Cocker Spaniel is widely known as a great family dog. This can be true and not so true but it all depends on how the two are brought together. The Cocker can have an aversion to sharp movements and loud noises, which is standard equipment on most kids so you need to make sure that children know how to be low-key and properly approach the dog.



Children should not be around a puppy Cocker Spaniel without supervision. Though he may be muscular and rugged, he's still fragile. Plus, during his impressionable, formative stage of life you don't want him to learn aggression or fear from bad interactions.

If the children and your Cocker grow up together it can be a wonderful experience because your puppy will have a built-in playmate to run, fetch and rest with.

Children can also learn responsibility and the importance of taking care of a living creature that depends on them for daily existence.

Bringing older dogs home can be more problematic if the Cocker has behavioral issues. Before you bring an older dog into a home with children of any age try to find out why the dog is in need of a home. If aggression towards children or anything else is a reason, you should pass.

Cockers & a New Baby

If you are expecting a new baby in a home that already has a resident Cocker, there are a few things you can do to prepare your pet for the baby's arrival. It's important to understand that just because a dog has done well with children; it does not mean he will do so with an infant. That's not to scare you, but to make you aware of the reality.

1. Hopefully he already responds to basic obedience commands, if not; you have nine months to practice. If necessary, now might be a good time for professional obedience classes if your own training hasn't been effective.
2. If possible expose your Cocker Spaniel to other babies. Visit friends with babies or head to a park or playground where mothers are likely to be. Keep your dog restrained, even when with a friend until you see how he will react. Pay attention to his body language and reactions to crying, squirming and sleeping.
3. Practice a longer than usual "Down" command, which will come in handy when feeding baby.
4. Silly as you may feel, practice baby activities with a doll: change diapers, feed, bathe & dress, etc.

Bringing Baby Home

Before you're ready to bring baby home, give (or have someone give) the Cocker something used by the baby in the hospital so that he'll be familiar with the scent when baby gets home. Upon arriving home, the mother should greet the dog without the baby, and then place the baby in the nursery. Don't ignore your Cocker or you may set the stage for jealousy. Initially you should block the door to the nursery with a baby gate so your Cocker can see and hear but not enter.

When it's time to meet, have someone handle and praise the dog, have the dog sit while the other person holds the baby. Let the Cocker see the baby and just enjoy a nice sit together. If it's going well, you can stay for as long as everyone is comfortable, extending the time with each session.

By including your dog in as many supervised activities as is reasonable, he will not feel neglected.

Cockers with Other Pets

Notice that title says "pets" not just "other dogs". Many homes are multi-pet homes and that doesn't always mean the average cat or fish. If you have birds or ferrets, you must be particularly careful with letting them roam free around your Cocker; he is after all a hunter! Even the most obedient Cocker may not be able to resist the response of his inner hunter.

Cockers & Cats

Cockers and cats are like any other dog-cat relationship. If one or the other already exists in your home, you should know how they react to the other species before you introduce a new one in the home. If their coexistence is always contentious it will be stressful for ALL of you and sadly, may lead to one or the other needing a new home. So, know what you're in for before you mix cats and dogs. They could be the happy odd couple or the war of the roses.

Dog to Dog Introductions

Two Cockers will probably love to play together and will usually pose little trouble. Problem is, if they've never met before and one already lives in your home.

Once you know that you're bringing home a new dog, if at all possible, arrange for the first meeting to be on neutral territory like at a nearby park or friends house. Even the most even-tempered dog can become protective if his space is invaded by a stranger. If you have more than one other pet, introduce each one individually. If you cannot do this and have to make the introductions at home, you might consider introducing them through a crate or baby gate.

Have someone handle one dog while you handle the other. Let them sniff each other while speaking to them in a pleasant and positive tone. Once they have had a chance to get to know each other, separate them so neither has a chance to get aggressive. Make sure you give your older dog equal amounts of attention; it's not all about the new puppy or dog.

At Home

Your new pup or dog must have his own food and water bowls, crate, bed, and toys so your older dog will not feel deprived. Over time they may begin to share and swap bowls and toys, which is a good thing as long as there's no fighting over them.

In the first few days, don't leave the pets alone for long periods of time without supervision, even if they seem to get along well. Walk them together and supervise play, especially when off-leash.

It could take just a few days to several weeks or even months before the older dog finally accepts the new one, and vice versa. Be patient and try not to panic if a fight breaks out. There may be pockets of safe play followed by unexplainable outbursts. This will be a period of hierarchy structure where they are establishing their ranks within this new pack. Try not to interfere; they will work out most disagreements on their own.

If they do get into a fight, don't get between them or you may be the victim of an accidental biting. Instead, try to distract them with some jumping or hand clapping. These fights usually sound worse than they are but if you seem to have a serious fight on your hands, try to get something else between your body and them. The safest option is to spray them with a water hose or douse them with a bucket of water.

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When the conflict is over your instinct will be to tend to the loser and soothe his wounds or ego. But you should actually take a moment and acknowledge the victor first to reinforce the dominance hierarchy. Believe it or not, this will reduce future knock-down, drag-out fights because the hierarchy will be set.





Breeding Your Cocker Spaniel

Why Breed Your Cocker Spaniel?

Why not, you might ask? Well, while it's understandable how you'd want to share the wonderful traits and beauty of your own Cocker with the world, breeding your own brood of Cocker Spaniels is generally not recommended.

As we discussed in the chapter on finding good breeders, it's a lot of hard work and takes years of dedication and training to create the 'perfect' litter. You cannot go in it half-heartedly; working any business is hard enough, but working one that involves living animals that depend on you for every basic necessity during the first months of their lives, is probably much more work than anyone expects.

Still, here we cover the basics just to help you understand what's involved.

Breeding Objectives

Before you ever introduce your female to that stud, you have to have a plan for every potential puppy. You need to consider how you will find them homes, what happens if you don't find them homes, how you will house them, feed them, etc. You have to plan for each scenario just as you would any other major event.

Rags not Riches

If you're thinking about breeding for the money; forget it. You won't get rich quick, if at all. If you're going to be a high quality breeder that does the proper testing, feeding and veterinary care, on most occasions you'll be lucky to recoup your expenses, let alone turn a profit.

You may find great satisfaction in creating new generations of healthy, happy, well-adjusted Cocker pups, but that may well be all the glory you'll receive.

Breeding to Standard

Earlier you learned that the objective of every good breeder is to create litters that meet or beat the standards set by registry organizations like the AKC or Kennel Club.

You have to pair the right set of parents to obtain the ideal physical traits and temperament. The Cocker Spaniel standard as provided in Chapter 3, defines the 'perfect' Cocker; fully describing what's expected in appearance, temperament, movement and in the case of field trials; ability.

As a breeder, it is expected that you will learn with each litter; fostering better litters with each season. The goal is to find a mate that accentuates your female's positive traits, and strengthens her weaknesses.

Choosing a Mate

When selecting a mate for your female, keep these three things in mind:

1. **Complementary traits.** You should select a male that complements or strengthens any weaknesses your female may have. Looking at the physical traits mentioned in the Breed Standard, identify the areas that are slightly under par in your Cocker and select a mate who is stronger in those areas. Perhaps it's stance, coat, head shape, temperament or another trait.
2. **Matching Moods.** Temperament is hereditary so it is very important that you select a dog with the ideal temperament. By ideal, the Cocker should be calm and cheerful yet steady; no shyness, fear or aggression.
3. **Healthy Specimen.** Like most humans desire, you Cocker should have a healthy mate. This seems obvious but if you don't verify that the chosen mate is free of genetic defects, you could be in for a world of trouble. Check his records just as you would if you were buying him.

Finding a suitable mate may take some time, but most importantly it takes education. Read as much as you can on the subject and on Cocker Spaniels in particular. You simply have to immerse yourself in the subject otherwise you'll be one of those unsavory puppy mills and we know you don't want that reputation.

You can usually obtain a list of studs from a breed-specific club, like the American Spaniel Club. Visit the breeders that interest you and study the dogs themselves, as well as the pedigree and health certificates.

Stud Fees

Once you have selected the mate for your female Cocker, you will need to negotiate the stud fee. A champion will cost more than a non-champion but that doesn't mean a non-champion is a bad choice, maybe you will have the first champion in his lines! The fee can be a cash agreement, pick of the litter or a combination.

As with any contract, get it in writing.

Breeding the Female

A female Cocker will go into heat, or estrus, or season, twice a year. Her first time will probably be somewhere between eight and 10 months of age. Estrus is the period of time in which your female will allow mating and could last between one and two weeks. She excretes a scent that males far and wide will smell and you may have unwanted suitors calling, so watch her carefully.

It is generally recommended that you not breed your female until her second or third estrus, to allow her to mature and be able to handle the stress of motherhood. You should also not breed her every time she comes in heat so that she can have time to fully recover between pregnancies.

If you've never owned a female dog before it may surprise you that she will bleed just before going into estrus, so you may need to confine her to non-carpeted areas, or be prepared to clean.

How to Know She's Ready

Before breeding, have your vet check her weight, check for worms and basically just make sure she's healthy to carry a litter. You will know she's ready when her vulva is swollen and red. She should mate within nine to 14 days of the appearance of redness, and will generally mate when the color changes from dark red to yellow.

The female is usually, if not always brought to the male's location. You shouldn't have to make formal introductions or set up play dates, once introduced nature should take its course. Once they have mated, allow the dogs to separate on their own, forcing them to do so could cause injury.

Note that you may allow them to mate more than once, especially if you're unsure where in the cycle your female may be.

Whelping and Caring for Puppies

You should know if the mating was successful within five to six weeks as the female's belly will begin to swell. The term of the average Cocker pregnancy is about 63 days after conception, so by the time you notice that belly, you're a little better than halfway there. The average Cocker litter is four to five pups.

If you need verification sooner, your vet can usually tell. You should introduce her to a whelping box or other prepared pallet created just for giving birth *before* she is actually ready to do so. Not unlike introducing her to her crate or bed for the first time, you want her to know that this is her place for this special occasion.

Placed in quiet, private area, the box should be large enough with low sides to accommodate her full size, in a stretched position. For comfort, you should also place towels or blankets in the bottom. You will want to change the bedding after whelping is complete.

What to Expect

Just before your female is ready to whelp, or give birth, she may experience loss of appetite. She might also start 'nesting,' as she prepares her place to give birth (she should already know about the whelping box, if not, show it to her now). Before whelping she will begin to shed the hair on her underbelly so the puppies can access her nipples. If it seems there is still too much hair, you may need to shave it.

Her temperature will drop from around 101.5° F (38.6° C) to about 99° F (37.1° C). Within 24 hours of this temperature drop, she will enter the first stages of labor. She will pant, appear restless, and may even vomit.

Shortly after that, she will begin the actual labor. Cocker Spaniels usually give birth on their own with relative ease. Each puppy is born in its own placental membrane, which she will remove, allowing the puppy to breathe. She will also sever the umbilical cord with her teeth. After delivery, she will lick each puppy to stimulate breathing.

Her instincts to mother will be immediate as she cleans, warms and feeds them. The newborns should begin to suckle soon after birth, taking in the antibodies they will need from mother's milk. These antibodies will support the puppies' immune systems during the first few days as their own little defense systems develop.

In Case of Trouble

Even though the Cocker usually gives birth without need of assistance, you should still be present in case of trouble. There are times when she may not remove the membrane or sever the umbilical cord. If this happens you will have to do it for her.

Acting quickly, but gently you would tear the membrane from around the face and head first and work your way back. You will need to clean any fluids from the puppy's nose and mouth and stimulate circulation by rubbing the pup briskly with something soft like a towel. To remove the umbilical cord, cut it about two inches from the belly and apply iodine to prevent infection.

For any other troubles you're not sure how to handle, contact your vet or emergency animal clinic for assistance.

Caring for the Newborns

The puppies will depend on mother to get through the first few days of life. They will need help keeping warm and should be kept in place that's at least 80° F (27 °C). One easy way is to do this is to place a heating pad under the bedding, just make sure it doesn't get too hot.

Just like human babies, it's sometimes hard to see the resemblance to mom and dad in that wrinkly skin, but rest assured the fine Cocker look will emerge more each day as they grow.

Within 72 hours you should have the vet dock their tails, which is a common, fairly painless procedure. Buyers will expect the tails to be docked and if you or a client will ever compete in a show, it is a requirement.

What to Expect

Don't be worried if the pups seem unresponsive. Cocker pups cannot see or hear when they are born. The mother will lick them frequently to help them excrete waste because at this stage they cannot do it on their own. Don't be alarmed, but she will also eat the excrement in order to keep the whelping box clean.

For about four weeks, you will only need to keep a watchful eye and make sure mom is doing her job and that everything looks in order. Your only requirement is to freshen the bedding until it's time to wean. Then the fun begins for you!

Weaning

You will notice around week three or four that that puppies' eyes are completely open and hearing is more acute. It is now time to wean them; to get them off of mom's food and into their own. The mother will most likely start the process herself by slowly evading the pups or refusing to let them take a nipple.

Weaning can sometimes be difficult but as with all training, patience is key. If the mother does not start to wean by the fourth week, you will have to step up the efforts. Make a puppy porridge by softening a high-quality puppy food with hot water. Place it in a shallow plate or bowl and set the puppies around it. They probably won't gravitate to it just yet so smear a small amount on each pup's nose. They will most likely lick it off. Smear some more on and repeat a couple of times. They should eventually get curious and sidle on up to the bowl themselves.

At each feeding, as confidence and stamina grow, you can begin reducing the amount of water used until they are eating dry food.

Caring for the Growing Puppy

Remember that puppy-proofing you did back when you brought the puppies' mom home as a pup? Well, it's time to do it again because instead of one curious pup, you'll now have several to that need to be kept out of harm's way.

At six or seven weeks of age it will be time for the first vet visit to be checked for worms and receive vaccinations. You will also need to begin the mental separation as soon you will be finding new homes for these little bundles of fur.

If you don't already have plans for homes you might again contact your local Cocker Spaniel club and ask if they have a list of potential buyers. Please, please remember, your job as a responsible breeder does not stop here. Your goal is to find good, loving homes for these precious pups.

Review the chapter on "Breeders," prepare your own list of questions for potential buyers and work hard to become a breeder with the good reputation. You don't just want your hard work, time and money going to waste, you want that little life you helped create to go on to have a full, happy life with someone who'll care for him.

Conclusion

The Cocker Spaniel is a wonderful breed that suits many owners. Like any breed, it has some specific characteristics that you should now have a better understanding of. Although not the right choice for every family, Cocker Spaniel owners are taken by the character and active nature of these companionable dogs. For many, having a dog that wants to go with them everywhere, and take part in all activities is perfect as a companion. Cocker Spaniel owners love their active and intelligent dogs for their fierce independence and have-a-go attitude to all things!

Remember.....life is short so have fun often and smile every day!



Resources

This list of resources includes services or products mentioned throughout the book. It is in no way a comprehensive list of all available resources for dog or Cocker Spaniel owners. Appearance in the list in no way endorses or guarantees the content although every effort has been made to provide quality resources.

Kennel Clubs

The American Kennel Club

260 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10016
Telephone: 212.696.8200
<http://www.akc.org>

The Kennel Club of England

1 Clarges Street
London
W1J 8AB
Telephone: 0870 606 6750
<http://www.the-kennel-club.org.uk/>

The Canadian Kennel Club

89 Skyway Avenue, Suite 100
Etobicoke, Ontario
M9W 6R4
Telephone: 1-800-250-8040
<http://www.ckc.ca>

Pet Insurance

US <http://www.petinsurance.com>
Canada <http://www.petplan.com/index.aspx>
Australia <http://www.petsure.com.au>
UK <http://www.petsbest.com>

Find a Shelter or Rescue Group

US & Canada <http://www.petfinder.com>
Australia <http://www.happypaws.com.au/>
UK (Cocker-specific) <http://www.thecockerspanielclub.co.uk/>

Dog Tags

<http://www.doggieid.com>
<http://www.dog-e-tag.com>
<http://www.pettags.com>

High Grade Dog Foods

<http://www.canidae.com/>
<http://www.petfooddirect.com>
<http://www.naturalbalance.net>
<http://www.eaglepack.com/>
<http://www.solidgoldhealth.com/>
<http://wysong.net/page/WOTTPWS/CTGY/NEWPC>

The Complete A-Z Guide To The Cocker Spaniel

<http://www.newmansownorganics.com/pet/>
<http://www.chickensoupforthepetloverssoul.com/>

Pet Loss

<http://www.rainbowsbridge.com/Poem.htm>
<http://www.alln.org>
http://www.avma.org/communications/brochures/pet_loss/pet_loss_brochure.asp

Doggie Litter/Housetraining/Dog Training

<http://www.mydogbehaves.com>
<http://www.doglitter.com>
<http://www.wizdog.com/>
<http://dog-litter-box.dogs-central.com/>

Magazines

Dog Fancy, Dog World and other dog magazines can be found in one place.
http://www.dogchannel.com/dog/magazines/dogworld/toc_dw200604.aspx

Books

The Humane Society of the United States Complete Guide to Dog Care: Everything You Need to Keep Your Dog Healthy and Happy, by Marion Lane.

A New Owner's Guide to Cocker Spaniels, by Judy Iby.

How to Train Your Cocker Spaniel, by Liz Palika.

The Original Dog Bible : The Definitive Source to All Things Dog, by Kristin Mehus-Roe.

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Sharda Baker

www.cocker-spaniel-world.com

Contact us at;

<http://www.asksharda.com/support>

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