



A question many of us have heard, usually following our response to friendly questions about our beautiful dogs' breed: No, actually, our black and gold dog is not a Rottie / Shepherd mix. No, our blonde dog is not a Golden Retriever. And no, our black dog is not a Flat Coated Retriever. Our dog is a Hovawart. And, to be honest, it's rather likely that the dog of a friend of a friend who looks just like ours is not a Hovawart. Hovawarts are a rare breed in the United States and Canada. You're really lucky if you meet one by chance!

Let's get you acquainted with our favorite breed

Let's assume that you requested this information because you have already done a little bit of research online around the Hovawart, you've seen pictures, and you know about their appearance, typical size, weight, and other standards freely available online. You know that the Hovawart is a German breed, its Old German name being loosely translated as variations of "Estate Guardian"; Hov meaning farm or estate, and Wart meaning guard. But you may not know that the modern German term for goal keeper is "Torwart". Yes, it's the same use of Wart, and the Hovawart takes his job just as seriously. To be sure, you should know that the Hovawart is a guard breed.

A well-balanced Hovawart isn't robotic or mindless in his guarding. He is an intelligent, thinking dog that has been bred over generations to evaluate and respond appropriately to different situations, take cues from their people, and relax around (and often give kisses to) invited strangers. The Hovawart bonds closely with his people and needs to live his life as part of the family; he is not a kennel or exclusively outdoor dog.

Temperament

The FCI Hovawart breed standard states the following regarding the Hovawart temperament:

BEHAVIOUR / TEMPERAMENT:

- Recognized working dog with versatile usage.
- Kind and even disposition.
- Protective instinct, self-confidence and ability to take stress.
- Of medium temperament; combined with a very good nose.
- His balanced body proportions and special devotion to his family make him an outstanding companion, watch, guard, tracking and rescue-dog.

There will be differences in temperament from one Hovawart to another. Some Hovawart dogs will be more or less guardy than others, some will be more calm or active than others, some will have more or less play and prey drive than

others, etc. However, the Hovawart should not be aggressive, nor should they be lethargic, they should not be nervous or fearful. These are all disqualifying “faults” for breeding.

Some common temperament traits we see in many Hovawart dogs are:

- More than typical mouthing as puppies and jumping up, but with consistent positive training, this can be resolved.
- The breed's mental maturity tends to be slow so most Hovawart dogs are not “perfectly trained” at one year of age. Though the slow mental maturation may be considered a “negative” for some, the breed tends to remain mentally and physically active, much longer than most breeds of similar size. It is not unusual to see 12+ year old Hovawart dogs playing, swimming, jogging and hiking; though for shorter periods than when young.

Hovawart dogs should be curious and aware of what is happening around them. Because they are typically very interested in their surroundings, over stimulation, especially as a puppy, can become an issue when in very busy places and care should be taken. Socialization is very important, but should be age appropriate as too much stimulation can create stress in the pup/dog, and contribute to anxious, unsure, aggressive and/or reactive behavior. It's best to go at the puppy's speed when socializing. If the puppy is a quick explorer just go with the flow and if the puppy needs a little time and take in the environment, let him do so.

The Hovawart may be standoffish at first with strangers, but then friendly. As is true for many guard breeds, they are not generally really friendly with dogs outside their pack. However, we have seen some Hovawart dogs that do well with strange dogs. Those dogs have typically been heavily socialized with strange dogs on a daily basis as puppies, and the socialization continued throughout their life. They tend to play hard with other dogs, and this sometimes gets them into trouble. "Dog parks" are not generally recommended for the Hovawart.

The Hovawart has the ability to work independently and is considered a free thinking breed. The Hovawart breed is not generally recommended to first time dog owners. The breed is not as eager to please as some breeds and they tend to not work for their people, but with their people. They most always require some motivation to do what is asked of them. A close bond with their people and positive reinforcement (force-free, reward based training, ie. food, praise, toy etc.) will generally provide the best results. Old-fashioned and outdated training methods may bring results but the risk of backfiring.

Health

Overall, Hovawart dogs are considered quite healthy compared with many large breed dogs, with quite a few dogs we know of living comfortably to 13+ years of age, some even 15+. This is in no small part due to decades of responsible breeding by reputable breed clubs around the world. This does not mean that we do not see health issues in the breed, and some lines show more problems than others. Some of the health issues seen in the Hovawart are the same as any other large breed dog, such as hypothyroidism, Degenerative Myelopathy (DM), cancer, heart issues, hip dysplasia, and others. However, we wouldn't say that any of these health concerns are common to the breed.

The health of a puppy is determined partially by genetics, partially by the way a breeder raises their puppies, and not least by how you raise your puppy. You can take measures within your control towards raising a healthy large breed puppy in body and mind, including but not limited to a wholesome diet, maintaining a healthy weight, providing age-appropriate exercise that helps develop a sound structure and muscle tone, and limiting exposure to chemicals and toxins. A responsible breeder (and the resources a breed club like the American Hovawart Club can offer you) will help you make the right choices.

Although genetics and breeding are not directly within your control, you can take steps to increase the likelihood of adding a healthy, well-bred puppy or adult dog to your family. As with any dog breed you wish to add to your family, it is your responsibility to do your due diligence and choose your breeder carefully.

With a rare breed like the Hovawart, litters may be far apart, but consider that the first litter you find advertised may not be a thoroughly researched and well-bred litter. Some litters may not even be advertised publicly, because often, the breeder has spent a lot of time getting to know interested buyers before even planning the breeding, and may have built enough relationships to place all puppies. Evaluate your choices of breeders, ask questions about their breeding philosophy, and work with a responsible breeder who invests great effort and care into selecting the breeding pair and checking the parents' lines for health and character issues. Be prepared to start your research early, be patient waiting for the right puppy, and be prepared to answer detailed questions about your own situation as well.

With any litter you inquire about, ask questions about the litter's parents and any offspring that either parent has previously produced. A responsible, well-educated, and experienced breeder will have done their best to also obtain health information on each parent's own litter mates, on the grandparents and their litter mates, and so on, going back several generations. While this research may reveal some health issues in the litter's lines, the responsible breeder will have taken care to pair dogs where such health problems are not knowingly being doubled-up on.

Work with breeders that require health and temperament testing for both parents, as well as conformation with the breed standard in both structure and temperament. Common tests for breeding dogs include: Hip X-rays, thyroid testing, DM testing and eye certification, all showing the dogs to be clear of genetic disease, as well as temperament testing and structure assessment by qualified assessors such as breed judges, or people trained by accredited organizations.

Male or Female?

We sometimes hear that people interested in a Hovawart would prefer a female, thinking they may be more lovey and calm than males. With the Hovawart, this may not necessarily be so. There is an obvious size and weight differences between males and females, which can be a valid reason for preferring one sex over the other. In terms of temperament, however, males are generally thought to be more "lovey dovey lap-doggish" than females, with females often displaying a bit more of an independent disposition. These are generalizations, of course there are some females that are lovey dovey and males that are more independent. But a decision regarding the sex of a dog shouldn't be made based on the assumption that females are lovey and males are not. Both sexes bond equally close with their family. Your breeder will be able to offer you some insights into the puppies' individual behaviors at a young age, as well as their parents' behavioral traits, and they can offer advice on your specific situation and considerations around having intact males or females in your home.

Exercise and Activities

As a large, intelligent, and active breed, the Hovawart requires your significant commitment to age-appropriate physical and mental exercise and to keeping his large, elongated body lean and trim. Given your time commitment, the significant exercise needs of a fully grown Hovawart can be met in fun and inventive ways, as the breed excels in many outdoor activities. With appropriate positive reward based training, they tend to greatly enjoy and can become highly skilled at tracking, search and rescue, K9 Nosework, obedience, and many other activities. Competitive agility may not be the most suitable dog sport, as the quick and tight turns may put excessive strain on his elongated back. Few Hovawarts will turn up their nose at a long hike or run, a chance to swim, or a hard romp on the beach. At the end of a busy day, the well-balanced Hovawart will be a pleasant companion in the home, always up for a game with the toy at a moment's notice, but also able to relax quietly in your company.

Training

The Hovawart was bred to think and make decisions and therefore needs to be respected and taught in a respecting manner. Positive reinforcement methods or reward based training is not spoiling or training for weak people. It is science based and free of force, but it sets rules and requires consistency. Alpha rolling is an outdated useless but rather dangerous method that you do not want to ever use. Discipline does not mean force. Using reward based training helps building a bond with the Hovawart and motivating him to want to work with you. Again, rules and consistency are required to be living with a well mannered and adjusted Hovawart. A Hovawart that is not respected or trained by force might stop working for the human or leave the situation. If force is used regularly there is the risk of a dog turning on the human. A Hovawart wants to work WITH and not for the human. A mutually respecting relationship built on force free methods promises best results.

Hovawarts and Children

The Hovawart is a good family dog and a Hovawart that is raised in a family with children typically accepts the normal play of children as they are socialized to children's behavior and activities as part of their daily existence. However, you must remember, especially when you have children, that the breed is a guard breed. When it sees other children playing with your children roughly or the children are screaming and having fun, the Hovawart may think they are in trouble and try to protect them. This is true of any breed, and you must socialize the dog to this kind of activity and behavior. Children and dogs (of any breed) should always be supervised by an adult. Some Hovawarts can exhibit dominant behavior, and it is not recommended that a puppy with dominant tendencies be placed in a home with small children.

Multi-dog Households

One of our members with a long history of a multi-pet household shared her story about life with a Hovawart in her large, diverse pack:

"I have had a lot of different breeds, sizes and temperaments come in to my pack at different times and stages of their life also different species as I have rescues too.

I know it has already been said about the intelligence of the Hovawart, but it does apply in a multi pet home. I feel a Hovi's free thinking allows the breed to better access situations which allows them to adapt better. But because of their intelligence, a very confident owner is needed for this breed especially in a multi pet household. I say this because if your Hovi doesn't think you can handle a situation they will.

It always amazed me how my Hovi handled all the newcomers throughout her life. She always welcomed every newbie, if they wanted to play she would play, some of the little dogs wanted nothing to do with her and that was fine to, she would give them their space. But once they were in the family they were her family and she protected us all."

When considering adding a new dog to a dog household, it is best to evaluate the temperament of the dog who already lives in the household. A character that compliments the temperament traits of the existing dog is helpful. Some temperament traits are not making it easy for some dogs to live together. This does not mean that a certain temperament is better than another, but rather that some temperament types have a harder time living together. This

is no different than human temperaments that may be more or less compatible. If you have questions or concerns, some members in the club who are experienced in multi-dog households can help answer those questions.

Home Sweet Home

First and foremost, the Hovawart is a breed of dog that bonds closely with its family. It is not a breed that should be predominantly kept in a kennel, or exclusively outside to patrol the property, or to be regularly separated from family life for long stretches of time.

Through our club's members, we know of Hovawarts who live in apartments, town homes with small yards, and on extensive acreages, from the heat and humidity of the southern US or East Coast to the colder climates of Canada.

The urban Hovawart:

In one of our member's experience, her apartment-dwelling Hovawart was a joy to live with, given that sufficient exercise and mental stimulation were provided on a daily basis. City life provided a lot of opportunity for socialization to all sorts of sights and sounds, and the hustle and bustle of the city, helping to build a confident dog that was not spooked by sirens, large groups of people, and busy roads. Dog related activities and resources were easy to find, such as puppy or obedience classes, choices in veterinarians and pet supply stores. Obviously life in the city also placed unique requirements on being a good canine citizen, living in close proximity with neighbors, children, dogs, bicycles, skateboards, and so on. Exercise space was severely limited with many city by-laws governing the use of the available space. Thought needed to be given to accommodating and directing the Hovawart's natural desire to work and guard the property. A balcony to watch the world go by was the dog's favorite place to spend time at home. Her Hovawart accepted the day to day activity in her high-rise apartment building as normal, and did not alert every movement and sound. Some situations, such as another dog entering the elevator, ended up being problematic given the confined space and direct face to face approach of the two dogs. In the same member's experience, while there were many positive aspects to living with a Hovawart in an urban environment, the daily time commitment to travel to areas outside of the city where the dog could be exercised off leash proved to be difficult to keep up. The member chose to relocate to a more rural property after four years of living in the city.

Some other dogs live in urban townhouses or detached houses and do well after having been socialized to city life and getting the necessary physical and mental exercise.

The hot Hovawart:

Given that Hovawarts were originally bred in the colder climates of Germany, they still prefer cold climate. Some of our members live in Southern California, where it can be in the high 90's to low 100's for weeks in August through October, or at the East Coast where it usually is in the 90s or even higher with high humidity. During this time, the Hovawart dogs prefer to lie on cold tiles, or on or near air-conditioning vents during the day. They tend to become much more active at night once the temperatures have cooled. Being naturally strong swimmers, many Hovawarts also love to swim in pools, lakes, ponds, and the ocean during the hot times. One member shared a story of her Hovawarts regularly lying down on and licking frozen ice bottles, and treating ice cubes fallen from the ice maker like candy from a secret god.

Our member noted that a temperature of 82F or 28C is a definite cut-off for outdoor exercise / activities with her dogs, as they start to noticeably pant more heavily.

Generally speaking, although the breed standard calls for only a little undercoat, some Hovawarts may have heavier coats than others. This can sometimes be seen in dogs from some family lines, or in spayed and neutered dogs. A heavier coat may result in even lower tolerance of high temperatures than the typical Hovawart. We have also seen some Hovawarts avoid direct sunshine and seek shade regardless of temperatures. Paying close attention to the dog's

comfort in warm and hot conditions is very important to prevent burned paws from hot asphalt or serious medical emergencies such as heat stroke. Products such as a musher's balm can be helpful in avoiding burned paws.

The cold Hovawart

Most Hovawarts love the cold weather and want to spend much time outside. They enjoy having the cold wind running through their coats and faces and don't necessarily understand the human fussiness and desire to be indoors. While they might turn up their nose at hot temperatures they clearly appreciate cold weather and snow. That said, attention still needs to be paid to their comfort, as some dogs may be prone to build-up of ice and snow between their paw pads. Again, products like a musher's balm as well as maintenance of the fur that grows between the pads can be helpful in eliminating this type of discomfort for the dog.

Thank you for your interest in the Hovawart. We hope we have answered some of your questions about this wonderful breed. We will continue to add to this document, expand the topics, and get more stories from our members. Thanks to all members who have contributed, and to the authors of the books we've referred to.