



September 2026



PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Our Fun Day is September 13th at Diane Reba's home. Please check your emails for the sign-up link for the pot luck and for all the details! We look forward to seeing you there!

From Wolfhound Poetry by Philip Santilhano

A Shady Tree Haiku

Under a small tree
enjoying the midday shade
from the baking sun

Hieronymus

(Dad's note: The first sunny day in a few weeks, and the wolfhounds are behaving like hairy vampires.)



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If you would like to contribute to the newsletter, please contact Kathy Lewis.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER continued

August Meeting Fun at Linda King's



20 Most Common Plants That Are Toxic to Dogs

<https://www.chewy.com/education/dog/health-and-wellness/complete-guide-to-poisonous-plants-for-dog>

Learn which common plants are toxic to dogs, warning signs to watch for, and how to pet-proof your home.



By Shelby Deering, Jun. 25, 2026



Photo by iStock/Galina Tsyrlnik

Many common plants can be toxic to dogs, including house plants like philodendron and garden plants like tulips and azaleas. The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center reported that in 2025, 7.5 percent of all calls were related to pets ingesting plants toxic to them, making plants sixth on their list of the top 10 pet toxins.

We spoke with a director at the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center and three other veterinarians to identify the most common plants toxic to dogs, warning signs to watch for, plus a complete list of highly toxic (but less common) plants to avoid. Learn practical ways to pet-proof your home and yard to protect your dog from poisonous plants.

Dogs are curious creatures, notorious for putting their snouts into things they shouldn't and scarfing up everything from sidewalk litter to newly planted flower bulbs. If your dog chews or ingests toxic plants, you should contact your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661 right away.

Key Takeaways

- Many common plants can be toxic to dogs and can lead to serious illness.
- Symptoms of plant poisoning may include drooling, diarrhea, vomiting, seizures, difficulty breathing or walking, lethargy, dilated pupils, changes in appetite or pawing at the face.
- Call the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661 or visit your vet immediately if your dog ingests a toxic plant.
- Check plant names for potential toxicity before bringing new varieties into your home and pet-proof your home carefully.
- Pet-safe alternatives are available for most decorative plants.

Quick List of Common Plants That Are Toxic to Dogs

These 20 common indoor and outdoor plants can be toxic to dogs.

- Begonia
- Chrysanthemum
- Cyclamen
- Daffodils
- Dieffenbachia
- Geranium
- Gladiolus
- Hosta
- Hydrangea
- Japanese Yew
- Lantana
- Lily of the Valley
- Oleander
- Peace Lily
- Peony
- Philodendron
- Pothos
- Rhododendron
- Sago Palm
- Tulip

If your dog chews or ingests anything toxic, including poisonous plants, immediately call your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661.

20 Most Common Plants That Are Toxic to Dogs

1. Begonia



schnuddel/E+

Found both indoors and out, the begonia is famed for its bright colors and interestingly shaped leaves. Dr. Schmid says that this plant is “toxic to both dogs and cats, but only expected to cause vomiting and diarrhea.” She adds that all parts of the plant are toxic.

Begonias can cause vomiting and diarrhea when dogs and cats ingest the stems, leaves, and flowers, Dr. Kendall says, due to insoluble calcium oxalate crystals in the plant.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Kidney damage (if the bulb is ingested)

2. Chrysanthemum (Mums)



Seen frequently during the fall months, you can't miss colorful, pom pom-like mums seen in landscaping and in planters. "They are toxic to both dogs and cats, but are only expected to cause GI upset," Dr. Schmid says.

Dr. Kendall further explains, "Mums contain pyrethrins, which can also be found in insecticides. However, pyrethrins in the plant do not pose any risks when the plant is eaten due to their low concentrations."

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Decreased appetite

3. Cyclamen



iStock/Jennifer Seeman

With intensely colored blooms (think every shade of pink) that last a long time, cyclamen is a popular houseplant, especially in the winter.

If your pup eats any part of the plant, they're likely to:

- Drool
- Vomit
- Have diarrhea

If they dig up the plant and gobble up the roots (or tubers as they're known), it can affect their heart rate and rhythms, and may even cause death, Dr. Hohenhaus says.

4. Daffodil



Orthosie/iStock/Getty Images Plus

In cheerful shades of yellow and dotting springtime landscapes, you can't help but smile when you spot a sea of daffodils. But we doubt your dog or cat would be in a good mood if they ingest these plants.

Eating the foliage of a daffodil can result in vomiting and diarrhea, Dr. Schmid says, and in rare cases, seizures can result from eating the bulbs.

Symptoms of ingestion include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Poor appetite
- Possible seizures and changes in blood pressure from ingesting bulbs

5. Dieffenbachia (Dumb cane)



These mostly indoor plants have lush green leaves with white spots or stripes. If your dog nibbles on the leaves, they're likely to feel as if their mouth, tongue, and lips are burning, thanks to the calcium oxalate crystals (the same ones found in philodendrons).

According to Ann Hohenhaus, DVM, DACVIM, a veterinarian at Animal Medical Center in New York City, other symptoms include:

- Drooling
- Vomiting
- Difficulty breathing

6. Geranium



KenWiedemann/E+

Popular in outdoor planters and hanging baskets, geraniums come in lots of colors—but no matter the hue, they are toxic to dogs and cats. Although all parts of the plant are toxic, Dr. Schmid points out that symptoms usually resolve on their own without needing medical treatment.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Depression
- Anorexia

- Skin irritation

7. Gladiolus (Gladiola)



Inzyx/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Easy to spot in a garden, gladiolas, which come in several different colors, are very tall and can bear upwards of 20 blooms on a single “spike,” as it’s called. Toxic to both dogs and cats, Dr. Schmid says that vomiting can be severe and contain blood. All parts of the plant are toxic, with the bulb being the most toxic.

Symptoms include:

- Severe vomiting that may contain blood
- Drooling
- Diarrhea
- Lethargy
- Painful abdomen

8. Hosta



Marina Kositsyna/iStock/Getty Images Plus

As perennial plants that live in shaded areas, hosta plants, with their lush, vibrant leaves, are toxic to dogs and cats alike.

Jennifer Kendall, DVM, DABT, DABVT, senior toxicologist at the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center, explains that all parts of the plant contain something called saponins, which can irritate the intestinal tract.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Depression
- Anorexia (not eating)

9. Hydrangea



aasemany/iStock/Getty Images Plus

In varying shades of blue, pink, and purple, hydrangeas, with their large flower clusters, are certainly pretty from afar. But this plant is toxic to both dogs and cats.

Even though all parts of the plant are toxic, Renee Schmid, DVM, DABT, DABVT, director of veterinary medicine and senior veterinary toxicologist at the Pet Poison Helpline, says that only GI upset will likely result.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

- Decreased appetite

10. Japanese Yew (Buddhist pine, Southern yew)



iStock/BbenPhotographer

These plants look like small evergreen trees or shrubs with needle-like leaves and small red berries. You can find them throughout the United States.

While the berries aren't toxic to dogs, the leaves, seeds, and bark are.

According to Dr. Stern, they can cause:

- Vomiting
- Lethargy
- Wobbly gait
- Heart and blood pressure changes, which can be life threatening

Other early warning signs your dog may display include seizures and muscle tremors.

11. Lantana



A lantana plant is a shrub that brims with colorful, cluster-like flowers, and it's toxic to dogs and cats. Your pet's reaction may depend, in part, on the ripeness of the berries they've eaten.

If eaten by your dog, the unripe berries of a lantana can have severe effects. "In very large ingestions, you can see coma and death," Dr. Schmid warns. Ripe berries, on the other hand, typically only cause vomiting and diarrhea.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Dilated pupils
- Difficulty walking
- Lethargy
- Coma
- Death

12. Lily of the Valley



iStock/Александр Довянский

There are a ton of reasons why lilies of the valley are such popular garden plants: They are sweet-smelling; they have adorable, little white bell-shaped flowers; and they can thrive in shady places. But though they may be pretty, lilies of the valley are poisonous to dogs.

“Even a small exposure to any part of the plant can cause heart problems for dogs—changes in heart rate and rhythm,” Dr. Stern warns.

Eating a few leaves or bulbs can also lead to the following symptoms:

- Diarrhea
- Vomiting
- Low blood pressure
- Disorientation
- Seizures
- Coma
- Arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat)

13. Oleander



iStock/LordRunar

Oleander is a common landscaping plant, especially on the West Coast. This bushy shrub can grow as high as 12 feet, and it's prized for its cluster of flowers in shades of yellow, white, pink, and red.

Every inch of this plant is poisonous to dogs—from the flower petals to the pointy, long leaves.

“Like lily of the valley, oleander also contains cardiac glycosides,” Dr. Stern explains, adding that symptoms can include:

- Changes in heart rate and heart rhythm

- Diarrhea
- Abdominal pain
- Drooling and excess salivation
- Possible death

14. Peace Lily



Galina Tolochko/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Known for its white blooms and natural beauty, a peace lily isn't quite so peaceful for dogs and cats. These plants are toxic. They contain insoluble calcium oxalate crystals, which can cause severe pain to the mouth, tongue, esophagus, and stomach.

"These irritating crystals are found in all parts of the plant," Dr. Kendall says, and adds that symptoms appear immediately when chewed.

Symptoms include:

- Drooling
- Pawing at the face
- Vomiting
- Retching
- Redness and swelling of the lips, mouth, and tongue
- Diarrhea
- While extremely rare, if severe enough, swelling can affect the ability to breathe

15. Peony



fotolinchen/E+

Peonies are gorgeous summertime additions to outdoor landscaping, with their vibrant, fragrant blooms, but they are toxic to both dogs and cats.

Although ingestion of any part of the plant can cause symptoms, "it is more likely if the bark is ingested," Dr. Kendall says.

"In most cases, just GI upset develops," Dr. Schmid says. "If larger amounts are ingested, lethargy and depression may develop."

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Lethargy
- Depression

16. Philodendron



iStock/Tharakorn

Philodendrons have heart-shaped leaves and long vines, and are a very popular houseplant. Beware, though: These plants contain insoluble calcium oxalate crystals, which can irritate your dog's mouth and lips.

If they've swallowed some leaves, other symptoms include:

- Pawing the mouth
- Drooling
- Retching

17. Pothos



Firn/iStock/Getty Images Plus

Pothos plants, also known as Devil's Ivy, are houseplants that are frequently spotted within trendy interiors, beloved for their bright green hue and trailing vines. But, you'll want to keep them away from your pets.

"Pothos plants contain insoluble calcium oxalate crystals and can cause symptoms in both dogs and cats," Dr. Kendall says. "These irritating crystals are found in all parts of the plant," and symptoms result immediately when chewed.

Symptoms include:

- Drooling
- Retching
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea

- Poor appetite
- Redness and swelling of the lips, mouth, and tongue
- While extremely rare, if severe enough, this swelling could affect the ability to breathe

18. Rhododendron (Azalea)



iStock/Ooyoo

Rhododendron, often called azaleas, are flowering shrubs seen in many back and front yards across the country.

All parts of these flowering beauties contain grayanotoxin, and the reaction your pup gets depends on how much they've eaten.

"The most common sign with the ingestion of azaleas is stomach upset," Dr. Stern says.

It's very rare for dogs to eat a lot of azaleas, but when they do, they can get:

- Very weak
- Tremors
- Low blood pressure
- Irregular heart rate and rhythm

19. Sago Palm



iStock/rotofrank

With its stiff fronds, the sago palm looks like a tiny palm tree and can live indoors or outdoors. It's toxic to all pets, says Laura Stern, DVM, DABVT, director of client programs for the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center.

Symptoms include:

- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Seizures
- Liver failure
- Potentially death

And while the leaves and bark will harm your pup, "the seeds or 'nuts' contain the largest amount of toxins," Dr. Stern says.

20. Tulip



iStock/puhimec

Tulips are spring-blooming flowers that many people love to have in their home—indoors and outdoors. Dog parents should skip these brightly colored flowers, though.

If your dog chews on the lance-shaped leaves, they could get an upset stomach. However, the real danger lies when your dog digs up and eats the newly planted bulbs, which have the most toxins.

According to Dr. Stern, tulip bulbs can cause:

- Stomach upset
- Depression
- Loss of appetite

With large ingestions, dogs may also experience:

- Increased heart rate
- Difficulty breathing

Complete List of Plants That Are Extremely Toxic to Dogs



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Any plant can upset your dog's stomach, but toxic ones can produce severe symptoms, like intense vomiting or organ damage, depending on the plant and how much your pup ingests.

Here are all the plants known to produce the more serious side effects (you can also find a list with photos on the ASPCA's website):

- Adam-and-Eve (also known as Arum, lord-and-ladies, wake robin, starch root, bobbins, cuckoo plant)
- African wonder tree
- Aloe
- Amaryllis (also known as belladonna lily, Saint Joseph lily, Cape belladonna, naked lady, Barbados lily)
- Ambrosia mexicana (also known as Jerusalem oak, feather geranium)
- American mandrake (also known as mayapple, Indian apple root, umbrella leaf, wild lemon, hog apple, duck's foot, and raccoonberry)
- American mistletoe
- American yew (also known as Canada yew, Canadian yew)
- Apple (including crabapples; stem, leaves, and seeds contain cyanide, but the fruit is OK for dogs)
- Apricot (stems, leaves, and pit contain cyanide)
- Arrowhead vine (also known as Nephthytis, green gold naphthysis, African evergreen, trileaf wonder)
- Australian ivy palm (also known as Schefflera, umbrella tree, octopus tree, starleaf)
- Autumn crocus (also known as naked ladies)
- Azalea
- Baby doll ti plant (also known as ti-plant, good-luck plant, Hawaiian ti plant)
- Barbados pride (also known as peacock flower, dwarf poinciana)
- Barbados pride 2 (also known as bird of paradise, Poinciana, brazilwood)
- Begonia

- Bergamot orange
- Bird of paradise flower (also known as crane flower, bird's tongue flower)
- Bishop's weed (also known as false Queen Anne's lace, greater ammi)
- Bitterroot (also known as dogbane hemp, Indian hemp)
- Bittersweet (also known as American bittersweet, waxwork, shrubby bittersweet, false bittersweet, climbing bittersweet)
- Black calla (also known as Solomon's lily, wild calla, wild arum)
- Black laurel (also known as dog hobble, dog laurel, fetter bush, sierra laurel)
- Black walnut
- Bog laurel (also known as pale laurel)
- Borage (also known as starflower)
- Boxwood
- Branching ivy (also known as English ivy, sweetheart ivy, California ivy)
- Brunfelsia (also known as lady-of-the-night, kiss-me-quick, Franciscan rain tree)
- Buckwheat
- Burning bush (also known as spindle tree)
- Buttercup (also known as figwort)
- Butterfly iris
- Calamondin orange

- Calla lily (also known as trumpet lily, arum lily, pig lily, white arum, florist's calla, garden calla)
- Caraway
- Cardboard palm (also known as cardboard cycad)
- Carnation
- Castor bean plant
- Chamomile
- Chandelier plant (also known as devil's backbone)
- Cherry (stem, leaves, and pit)
- Chinaberry tree (also known as bead tree, China ball tree, paradise tree, Persian lilac, white cedar, Japanese bead tree, Texas umbrella tree, pride-of-India)
- Chinese evergreen
- Chinese jade (also known as silver jade plant, silver dollar)
- Chives
- Chrysanthemum (also known as mums)
- Clematis (also known as virgin's bower)
- Clivia lily
- Coffee tree
- Coleus (also known as bread-and-butter plant, Spanish thyme, East Indian thyme)
- Corn plant (also known as dragon tree)
- Cow parsnip (also known as giant hogweed)
- Cowbane
- Cyclamen

- Daffodil (especially the bulbs)
- Dahlia
- Daisy
- Desert rose (also known as desert azalea, mock azalea)
- Deadly nightshade (also known as climbing nightshade, poisonous nightshade, woody nightshade, and blue nightshade)
- Dieffenbachia (also known as dumb cane)
- Dog daisy
- Eastern star
- Elephant ears (also known as taro, malanga, and Caladium)
- Elephant-ear begonia
- Emerald fern (also known as emerald feather, asparagus fern)
- Epazote (also known as Mexican tea)
- Eucalyptus
- Fetterbush (also known as maleberry, staggerberry)
- Fleabane (also known as horseweed, showy daisy)
- Florida beauty (also known as gold dust dracaena, spotted dracaena)
- Foxglove
- Gardenia (also known as Cape jasmine)
- Garlic
- Geranium
- Giant dracaena (also known as palm lily, grass palm)
- Gladiola
- Glory lily (also known as gloriosa lily, climbing lily, superb lily)

- Good luck plant (also known as golden bird's nest, snake plant)
- Grapefruit (skin and plant parts; fruit isn't toxic)
- Heavenly bamboo (also known as sacred bamboo)
- Hellebore (also known as Christmas rose, Easter rose)
- Holly (also known as American holly, English holly, European holly, Oregon holly, inkberry, winterberry)
- Hops
- Horse chestnut (also known as buckeye)
- Hosta
- Hyacinth
- Hydrangea
- Indian rubber plant (also known as fig, weeping fig)
- Iris (also known as flag, snake lily, water flag)
- Iron cross begonia
- Jack-in-the-pulpit
- Jade plant (also known as baby jade, dwarf rubber plant, Chinese rubber plant, Japanese rubber plant)
- Japanese yew (also known as Buddhist pine or Southern yew)
- Jerusalem cherry (also known as winter cherry)
- Jonquil
- Lambkill (also known as sheep laurel)
- Larkspur
- Laurel (also known as mountain laurel, bay laurel)
- Lavender

- Leek
- Lemon (skin and plant parts; fruit is non-toxic)
- Lemon grass
- Lemon verbena
- Lily of the valley
- Lily-of-the-valley bush (also known as andromeda japonica)
- Lime (skin and plant parts; fruit is edible)
- Lobelia (also known as cardinal flower, Indian pink)
- Locust
- Lovage
- Macademia nut
- Madagascar dragon tree
- Mapleleaf begonia
- Marijuana (also known as Indian hemp, hashish)
- Marjoram
- Mayweed
- Metallic leaf begonia
- Milkweed
- Mint
- Mole bean plant
- Morning glory
- Narcissus (also known as paper white)
- Nightshade (also known as black nightshade)

- Oleander
- Onions
- Orange (skin and plant parts; fruit isn't toxic)
- Oregano
- Painter's palette (also known as flamingo lily, flamingo flower, pigtail plant, and oilcloth flower)
- Parsley
- Peace begonia
- Peace Lily
- Peach (stem, leaves, and pit)
- Pencil cactus (also known as sticks of fire)
- Peony
- Periwinkle (also known as running Myrtle)
- Philodendron
- Plum (stem, leaves, and pit)
- Poinsettia
- Poison hemlock (also known as deadly hemlock, winter fern, California fern, Nebraska fern)
- Pothos (also known as golden pothos, taro vine, devil's ivy)
- Prayer bean (also known as rosary bean, Buddhist rosary bean, Indian bean, Indian licorice)
- Prickly ash (also known as Angelica tree, prickly elder, Hercules' club, devil's walking stick)
- Primrose
- Privet (also known as wax-leaf)

- Purslane (also known as moss rose, rock moss)
- Ragwort (also known as golden ragwort)
- Ranger's button (also known as swamp white heads)
- Red-margined dracaena
- Red sage (also known as shrub verbenia, Lantana, yellow sage)
- Rex begonia
- Rhubarb
- Sago palm
- Shamrock plant
- Skunk weed (also known as skunk cabbage, swamp cabbage, polecat weed)
- Sorrel
- Spring parsley
- St. John's wort (also known as Klamath weed)
- Striped dracaena
- Sweet pea (also known as everlasting pea)
- Sweet William (also known as pinks)
- Tahitian bridal veil
- Tarragon
- Tobacco (also known as tree tobacco, mustard tree, Nicotiana)
- Tomato plant
- Tulips
- Wandering Jew
- Watercress

- Wisteria
- Yarrow (also known as milfoil)
- Yucca

What To Do If Your Dog Eats Toxic Plants

While some plants can just give your pup diarrhea, there are others that are extremely poisonous and can cause serious problems, like liver damage. On top of that, many of the more dangerous poisonous plants for dogs are also very common plants to have in your home, like sago palm plants.

If you think your pet has eaten a poisonous plant, head to the animal ER instead of trying to treat your pet at home.

If you aren't sure what your pet ate, call the ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Hotline at 888-426-4435 or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661.

They're available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They can tell you how toxic the plant is and if you need to seek veterinary care.

Tips for Pet-Proofing Your Home

The best thing to do as far as prevention goes is to not have these plants at all. But sometimes, that's just not possible—say, you bought a house with a yard full of azaleas. In that case, you can put a barrier up, use a dog play pen for outside time, keep your dog on a leash when they're in the yard, or use a plant stand to prevent your pooch from getting to these plants.

When adding greenery to your home, be sure to get plants that are pet-safe, like spider plants, violets, or orchids, suggests Dr. Hohenhaus.

If you have non pet-safe plants in your home, ensure they're not accessible to your dog. Utilize a dog crate or dog gate when your pup is unsupervised to ensure they don't eat anything they're not supposed to.

20 Houseplants Toxic to Dogs

Unsure which plants
are poisonous
to dogs?



These common
household plants are
the most toxic.



Hydrangea



Hosta



Peace Lily



Peony



Geranium



Chrysanthemum



Pothos



Begonia



Daffodils



Gladiolus



Lantana



Sago Palm



Tulip



Lily of the Valley



Oleander



Philodendron



Rhododendron



Dieffenbachia



Japanese Yew



Cyclamen

chewy

If your dog ingests anything toxic, including poisonous plants, immediately call your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline® at 855-764-7661.

FAQs About Plants That Are Toxic to Dogs

What should I do if my dog chews or ingests a plant that is toxic to dogs?

If your dog chews or ingests anything toxic, including poisonous plants, immediately call your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661.

Are snake plants poisonous to dogs?

"Yes, snake plants are toxic to dogs, but usually only cause vomiting and diarrhea," Dr. Schmid says. "With larger ingestions, there may be drooling, difficulty walking, and decreased appetite in dogs." Call your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661 if your dog eats or chews on one.

Are lilacs poisonous to dogs?

Dr. Kendall says that lilacs are not poisonous to dogs, but she adds, "Any time plant material is eaten, an upset stomach can occur, so pets may still experience a change in appetite, vomiting, or diarrhea." Call your veterinarian or the Pet Poison Helpline at 855-764-7661 if you are unsure which plant your dog has eaten or if your dog seems unwell.

Are orchids poisonous to dogs?

"Orchids are considered non-toxic to dogs, but may cause mild stomach upset," Dr. Schmid says. Still, discourage your dog from chewing plants, and contact your veterinarian if your dog eats a plant and shows concerning signs such as drooling or diarrhea.

Are spider plants poisonous to dogs?

Spider plants are considered to be non-toxic to dogs, according to Dr. Schmid, but they may cause mild stomach upset so it's still best to keep them out of reach if your dog likes to chew plants. Call your veterinarian if your dog eats a plant and develops concerning signs.

Are roses poisonous to dogs?

“Roses are not considered toxic to dogs, but may cause stomach upset, and the thorns can cause trauma to the mouth and esophagus if ingested,” Dr. Schmid cautions. Keep roses out of reach and call your veterinarian if your dog is hurt or seems unwell after contact with a rose bush—especially its stems or thorns.

Attributions

Linda Rodgers contributed to this story.

This content was medically reviewed by Kelly Gold, DVM, Chewy veterinarian.

Shelby Deering

Shelby Deering is a freelance lifestyle writer from Madison, Wisconsin. She specializes in writing about home design, health, and of course, pets! When she's not writing, you'll find her snuggling with her corgi, Dolly, or asking to pet every dog she sees.

IW Reference Ranges for Blood Parameters

Establishing Breed-Specific Reference Intervals for Hematologic, Serum Biochemical and Thyroid Function Parameters in Irish Wolfhounds

From the Irish Wolfhound Foundation, <https://www.iwfoundation.org/studies/IW-blood-parameters>

Specific Aim:

This research project is aimed at developing breed-specific reference ranges for blood parameters, including complete blood count (CBC), blood chemistry and thyroid hormone concentrations in Irish Wolfhounds.

Introduction: <https://www.iwfoundation.org/studies/IW-blood-parameters>

It has long been known that there are substantial breed variations in hematologic, metabolic and endocrine parameters in dogs, which have the potential to lead to issues with diagnosing and treating important diseases.¹⁻⁴ In addition, previous studies have shown substantial breed

variation in thyroid function tests between dog breeds.⁵ Important variations in reference intervals have been noted in multiple studies of Greyhounds.^{6–8} Interestingly, a recent study of Scottish Deerhounds showed variations in reference intervals that were similar to Greyhounds for some parameters, but also included some differences from Greyhounds, suggesting that variability likely exists between sighthound breeds.⁹

Breed-specific reference intervals for hematology, serum biochemistry and thyroid function tests have not been evaluated in Irish Wolfhounds. The one-size-fits-all approach to reference intervals could lead to misdiagnoses, delayed treatment, and suboptimal care for Irish Wolfhounds, as their physiological and hematological profiles may significantly differ from those of other breeds. The need for breed-specific reference ranges in Irish Wolfhounds arises from several compelling factors:

1. **Unique Physiological Characteristics:** Irish Wolfhounds exhibit distinct physiological characteristics due to their size and breed-specific genetics. These differences can impact the interpretation of blood parameters, leading to misunderstandings of their health status.
2. **Health Challenges:** Irish Wolfhounds are prone to specific health issues, such as cardiac conditions, bloat, and musculoskeletal problems. Accurate reference ranges tailored to their breed might aid in the early detection and management of these conditions.
3. **Precision Medicine:** As personalized and breed-specific healthcare becomes increasingly important in veterinary medicine, establishing reference ranges tailored to Irish Wolfhounds may enhance the precision of diagnostics and treatments.
4. **Improving Healthcare Outcomes:** By ensuring accurate reference intervals, we can facilitate timely and appropriate interventions, ultimately improving the overall health and longevity of Irish Wolfhounds.

5. **Research and Education:** This initiative will not only benefit Irish Wolfhounds but also contribute to the broader veterinary community by advancing our understanding of breed-specific variations in blood parameters.

Materials and Methods:

Irish Wolfhound Recruitment:

In keeping with Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute (CLSI) guidelines, 120 healthy Irish Wolfhounds without any history of chronic disease will be recruited from the Irish Wolfhound Association of the Delaware Valley specialty and the Irish Wolfhound Club of America national specialty, as well as other regional groups. A [pre-collection screening survey](#) will be used to identify any diseases or conditions that could affect the tests, including a history of polyuria/polydipsia, kidney disease, heart disease, endocrine disease, or neoplasia. Dogs with any of these conditions or signs will be excluded.

Sample Collection:

After obtaining informed consent, all subjects will have a full physical exam, and the following blood samples will be collected from 120 Irish Wolfhounds via a single venipuncture of a lateral saphenous or cephalic vein.

1. 7 ml in a red top tube for serum biochemistry and T4, free T4 and TSH
2. 3 ml in an EDTA tube for complete blood count (blood films will be created and stored for each in case of the need for clinical pathologist review) .Two aliquots of serum will be decanted from the red top tube after centrifugation at 2500xg for 20 minutes. The aliquots will be frozen immediately on dry ice and then transferred to a -80C freezer for batch serum biochemistry and thyroid function testing.

All samples will be sent to IDEXX for analysis.

Statistical Analysis:

Data will be evaluated using descriptive statistics. All parameters will be evaluated using normality testing (D'Agostino and Pearson). Reference Intervals will be established by using the 5th and 95th percentiles using the methodology recommended in current CSLI guidelines.¹⁰

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Additional Study Details

Study Date(s): 9-22-2023

Study Status: Ongoing

Enrollment Status: OPEN to new enrollment

Lead Researcher(s): Guillermo Couto, DVM DACVIM

Irish Wolfhound Health and Longevity

From the Irish Wolfhound Club of America, <https://iwclubofamerica.org/>

Irish Wolfhounds are generally a hardy dog once grown, and the breed has few unique medical problems. They are fairly stoic, and even if they are in pain, they may be difficult to diagnose. Their rapid growth makes them prone to injury as puppies, and they suffer from the diseases common in giant breeds, some of which are serious. As a result, their lifespan is, on average, less than some breeds. Further, when they do get ill, canine specific medication is usually expensive as it is prescribed by weight. (Sometimes generic human medications can be used to reduce costs; always ask your vet if there are alternatives.)

Some of the serious health issues include:

- cancer, particularly osteosarcoma
- heart disease including dilated cardiomyopathy (often treatable)

- bloat and torsion (a.k.a., GDV for gastric dilatation and volvulus), a GI issue which requires immediate emergency care
- pneumonia, another serious emergency
- liver shunt (a.k.a., PSS or portosystemic shunt), a developmental disorder for which puppies should be screened at 8-10 weeks of age, before going to their new homes

Other issues include:

- joint issues, especially in rapidly growing puppies
- megaesophagus, a gastrointestinal problem, either congenital or acquired
- eye disorders, particularly progressive retinal atrophy
- seizures and other neurological issues
- low thyroid levels (hypothyroidism)
- Von Willebrand's disease, a bleeding disorder
- hygromas
- rear-end weakness in older dogs

Your breeder should be able to show that they have done testing for diseases known to be heritable (primarily eye, cardiac and joint diseases) and give you a family health history.

Health and Genetics

Some diseases are known to be genetic, and many are probably a combination of genetic predisposition and environment. Most of these diseases are being heavily researched, and the IWCA supports such research in several ways.

Some research is funded by donations to The Irish Wolfhound Foundation, a sister organization to the IWCA. The IWF focuses on health, education and rescue, sponsors and promotes scientific studies on IW health

concerns, and sponsors health testing at Irish Wolfhound specialties in the US and Canada. Where relevant, the health information presented on this website is linked to the [IWF website](#) for the most up-to-date information.

The IWCA also funds health initiatives through the AKC's Canine Health Foundation (CHF), which allows us to leverage the activities of other breed groups and make use of the CHF process for evaluation of proposals and influence them with our needs.

General Canine Concerns

The Irish Wolfhound is just as likely as any other dog to be bitten by a flea or tick, munch on a poisonous houseplant, or eat himself into obesity. Some aspects of these issues do have Wolfhound-specific elements to them, and the IWCA provides information here on some of those, but for most general health issues you should rely on your veterinarian, your breeder, and veterinary references such as the [Merck Veterinary Manual](#).

Spay and Neuter

Several studies have shown a correlation between early spay/neuter and cancers in large and giant breed dogs. Anecdotally, IWs who are neutered at the "usual" age of 6 months grow up to be taller and leaner than their intact littermates. The topic is complex; research it thoroughly and discuss it with your breeder and veterinarian before deciding if and when to spay or neuter your Wolfhound. An excellent article with references to many peer-reviewed studies can be found [here](#) on the Veterinary Information Network website.

Note:

The IWCA provides information on this website for the education of its readers. No information on this website should be used for veterinary medical purposes, diagnostically, therapeutically, or otherwise. Consult a veterinarian before attempting to medically treat your dog or changing your dog's medical treatment.

Finding a Vet

Need to find a veterinarian? Start with the AKC Canine Health Foundation's links to [veterinary schools](#) to find one in your area.

From the Desk of Elaine Starry

Puppy Growth Plates: What Every Owner Should Know:

Growth plates are one of the most important, and most vulnerable, parts of your puppy's development. Understanding them can help prevent lifelong joint and bone problems.

1. What Are Growth Plates?

Growth plates, or physes, are soft areas of cartilage near the ends of long bones.

In a puppy, bone doesn't start as solid bone. New bone cells are made inside these cartilage plates, which allows the bone to lengthen. Think of them as the construction zones for the skeleton.

Once the puppy has reached its adult size, hormones - primarily estrogen and testosterone during puberty - signal the plates to stop producing new tissue. The cartilage then hardens and is replaced by solid bone. We call that "closing" or "fusing."

They are much softer than the rest of the bone, so they are more prone to injury and fracturing.

2. Where Are They Located?

Puppies have growth plates in almost every long bone, but the most clinically important ones are:

Front legs:

Distal radius and ulna - just above the wrist / carpus

Proximal humerus - near the shoulder

Distal humerus - near the elbow

Back legs:

Distal femur - just above the stifle / knee

Proximal and distal tibia - just below the knee and just above the hock

Proximal and distal fibula - runs alongside the tibia

Other places: Hip bones, pelvis, vertebrae, and jaw also have growth centers. Dogs under one year of age have growth plates located near the ends of the bones of the limbs.

An injury to any long-bone growth plate can affect how that limb grows.

3. When Do They Close?

Not all plates close at once. It happens from the bottom of the legs upward, and depends heavily on breed size:

Toy and Small breeds (under 25 lbs): 6 - 8 months

Medium breeds (25-50 lbs): 8 - 12 months

Large breeds (50-90 lbs): 12 - 18 months

Giant breeds (over 90 lbs): 18 - 24 months

Most of the rapid longitudinal growth happens between 4 to 8 months of age. After 8 months, little lengthening occurs, but the plates remain soft and open until they fully calcify.

4. Why Precautions Matter

While open, those plates are the weakest link in the skeleton. A force that would only sprain a ligament in an adult dog can fracture a puppy's growth plate.

5. Precautions to Prevent Injury

You don't need to keep a puppy in a bubble, but you do need to avoid repetitive impact and uncontrolled trauma until closure:

1. Limit forced, high-impact exercise: No long-distance running, jogging with you, bicycling alongside, or extended fetch on hard surfaces. The rule of thumb many vets use: 5 minutes of structured exercise per month of age, twice daily, until maturity.

2. Avoid repetitive jumping: No jumping in and out of SUVs, off high beds, over agility jumps, or off decks. Use ramps or lift giant breeds.

3. No hard, slippery floors for play: Puppies skidding and twisting at speed puts shear force on the distal radius/ulna and distal tibia. Use rugs and non-slip mats.

4. Keep roughhousing controlled: Most growth plate fractures are associated with minimal trauma, such as a fall, getting a leg caught, or simply rough-housing with another dog. Avoid wrestling with much larger adult dogs.

5. Watch weight and nutrition: Overfeeding and high-calcium or excessive protein puppy foods can cause rapid growth, which stresses plates. Feed a large-breed puppy formula if your puppy will be over 50 lbs as an adult, and keep them lean.

6. Delay intense sports: Agility, flyball and dock diving should wait until plates are closed - often 12-18 months for most active breeds, longer for giants. Ask your vet about a final growth-plate radiograph.

6. What Happens When There Is an Injury?

Growth plate injuries are called Salter-Harris fractures. They are graded I through V based on how the fracture crosses the plate, cartilage, and

bone.

Signs:

Sudden lameness after a minor fall or play

Swelling around a joint, especially wrist or knee

Pain when touched, reluctance to bear weight

A limb that looks crooked or shorter after a few weeks

Consequences if not treated promptly:

Growth arrest: Part of the plate closes early while the rest keeps growing.

Angular deformity: If one side of a paired bone stops growing (very common with radius/ulna), the other bone continues and bends the leg.

This causes bowed front legs or knock knees.

Short limb: The entire bone stops lengthening, leaving one leg shorter than the other.

Joint incongruity and early arthritis: Uneven growth means the joint surfaces no longer line up properly.

Even a mild injury can have lifelong effects because the plate controls future growth.

7. What Can Be Done?

This is always a veterinary emergency - ideally with a veterinarian within 24 hours.

Diagnosis: Physical exam plus x-rays of both the injured leg and the opposite leg for comparison. Sometimes a CT scan is needed.

Treatment depends on severity:

Mild, non-displaced (Salter I and II): Strict rest, splint or cast, anti-inflammatories and pain control, and repeated x-rays to ensure healing is straight.

Displaced or joint-involving: Surgery to realign the plate with tiny pins or wires, without crossing the plate itself if possible. The goal is to preserve as much growth potential as possible.

If deformity has already started: More complex corrective surgery, such as cutting the bone that is growing too fast or lengthening procedures, may be needed later. In severe cases where the plate has completely closed early, surgery is done to salvage joint function.

Aftercare: Restricted activity for 4-8 weeks, physical therapy, weight control, and joint supplements as recommended. Your vet will want follow-up x-rays at 2, 4, and 8 weeks to watch for premature closure.

Prognosis: Caught early and treated correctly, many puppies recover completely. Fractures near the end of the growth period or those caught late have a higher risk of deformity.

If your puppy suddenly goes lame after playing, even if it seems minor, don't adopt a "wait and see" approach. Keep them quiet, don't give human pain medication, and call your veterinarian.

For your specific puppy, ask your vet at the 6-month and 12-month check: "Do you think the growth plates are closed yet, and what activity level is safe now?" A quick x-ray is inexpensive compared to corrective orthopedic surgery.

EPS

This information is for education and does not replace veterinary advice. If you suspect a growth plate injury, contact your veterinarian promptly.

<https://www.akc.org/>

What is Canine Good Citizen (CGC)?

At the AKC, we believe that all dogs can be good dogs, and all owners can be great owners, all it takes is a little bit of training, lots of love, and of course, plenty of praise along the way.

That's why we created the Canine Good Citizen® (CGC) program: an expert-made training program designed to help you and your dog be the best you can be—together.

Canine Good Citizen is a [10-skill test](#) that teaches good manners to dogs and responsible dog ownership to their owners.

AKC now offers a quick and easy way to submit your Canine Good Citizen Title Application! Try the new – [Title Application Portal \(TAP\) System](#).

Check out the website to get the list of test items and get started!

Who Can Participate in CGC?

CGC is open to all dogs—purebred and mixed breed. There are no age minimums or limits for participating in the Canine Good Citizen program, because yes, you can always teach an old dog new tricks!

With that being said, we also know that training a puppy can be very different than training an adult dog. Check out our specialized training program for puppies, [AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy](#), which teaches the basics to get your puppy off to a good start and is an excellent first in-person training class.

[AKC S.T.A.R. Puppy](#)



ROLLED GINGER COOKIES

1 cup shortening
 1 cup granulated sugar
 1 egg
 1 cup molasses
 2 tablespoons vinegar
 5 cups sifted all-purpose flour
 1½ teaspoons soda
 ½ teaspoon salt
 2 to 3 teaspoons ground ginger
 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
 1 teaspoon ground
 cloves

OVEN 375°

Cream shortening and sugar. Beat in egg, molasses, and vinegar. Sift together dry ingredients; blend in. Chill 3 hours.

Roll dough ⅛ inch thick on lightly floured surface. Cut in shapes. Place 1 inch apart on greased cookie sheet. Bake at 375° for 5 to 6 minutes. Cool slightly; remove to rack. Makes about 5 dozen.



From the Desk of Briget Wandruff

I'm going to cross post this because it's important and we need to start having these conversations - especially about veteran care:

I haven't written much on here ([Irish Wolfhound Club of America FB Group](#)) lately beyond photos of the dogs in the park — maybe a comment here or there in the health group. For the most part I've just been in

caretaking mode, which has been all-consuming for the last year or so. But a few things piled up this weekend in the health and grooming groups that I want to talk about.

Some background: Gawain just turned 9½, Lola is 8, and Sebastian is 9 months. Having a veterans now — and a puppy — has taught me a lot.

First: you don't get to veteran age without some sacrifice and medical support. I don't know many wolfhounds who hit 9½ without needing it. Gawain has recurrent aspiration pneumonia. Lola has various heart issues (no DCM, but she has A-fib and a couple of other things) that have responded well to medication — I heart test every single year, and catching things early makes a real difference.

Lola is our dynamic girl with a whole roster of things going on: a clotting condition, opioid sensitivity that means a special anesthesia protocol, and idiopathic chylothorax — first found in pleural fluid during a routine heart test over three years ago. She's gone from having her chest tapped once every three months to once a week, and she goes under anesthesia every time. You'd never know it looking at her — she's incredibly present, vibrant, energetic.

This is a dog who torsioned at 2, right after being spayed— a full 360 GDV— after her vet gave her tramadol. At 4, she had a liver torsion that got misdiagnosed as cancer: the ER vet looked at her enlarged liver and a belly full of blood, said it looked like hemangiosarcoma, and told me to put her down, that I “wasn't going to have much of a choice.” I refused without exploratory surgery first. She didn't have cancer — she had a full liver torsion, which we believe is far more common and misdiagnosed than people realize (we've actually written about this). She survived the surgery, though we found a clotting issue that made the first 48 hours touch-and-go — she wasn't making red blood cells. She's been living her best life since.

And then there's Sebastian, pure joy and mischief — he'll take furniture down to sticks before he comes out of destruction stage.

One thing I don't think we talk about enough: veteran care, medical issues or not. I think we need to ease up on some of the advice going around. Stripping an older dog's coat can genuinely hurt, and their hair often mats more as they age. I don't shave my dogs and never have, but I use good grooming scissors regularly to trim and cut out mats, so their coat stays manageable — tools like a Coat King help too. When I do strip, I use scissors for the finer areas like the ear tips; with Lola, I mostly don't strip at all anymore and just trim the end tips. Keep the hygiene basics up too — keeping them clean underneath, washing regularly (white vinegar helps with odor), and psyllium husk for anal gland and stool regularity.

Gawain has some rear-end weakness and had a perianal hernia repaired with surgery at 7 — he was neutered as part of that, since hormones play a role in perianal hernias. In hindsight, I waited too long: his prostate was already getting inflamed by the time we did it, and I'd probably do it a year earlier if I had it to do again. He also needs help pooping sometimes, and it's worth getting comfortable with that — talk to your vet about options, whether that's a stool softener or something gentler like slippery elm rather than a harsher laxative. He gets a quarter teaspoon of psyllium in his food twice a day. "Helping" him poop now is frequent—We keep gloves in the house for this. Don't let embarrassment or inconvenience stop you from helping your dog with something like this — it's just part of veteran care that no one talks about.

Keep them active and social, too. Gawain comes with us to Central Park most Saturdays — nothing strenuous, just time to enjoy himself. I've always made a point of one-on-one time with each dog, especially in a multi-pet household. For us that might be a car ride, coffee and a muffin with Gawain, picking something up for Lola along the way, or bringing Sebastian along to enjoy the café too.

For Lola specifically, I use an app called Bearable — it's built for tracking human quality of life, but I customized it for her: energy, whether she seeks out attention, engagement with her housemates, sleep, appetite, all the little things that are "Lola." We log it daily.

I've also never wanted to leave my dogs alone for more than three hours. I have a carer, Sam, who's been with us four years — he comes not just for walks but for real time with them: massage and stretching work with Gawain and now Sebastian using a balance disc, cuddles and quiet time with Lola. I also structure my own schedule around it, going into the office later so I can spend a few extra hours with them in the morning—leaving between 10:30-11A most days.

You have to be smart about heat, too — none of my dogs get more than a 10–15-minute walk when it's 90°+ out, and we shift longer walks to early morning or evening and adjust their food quantity as well as schedule during extreme weather.

Quality of life has to be an ongoing, honest conversation. With Lola, we track her daily — she's currently having about 3 liters of fluid drained from her chest every week. We've talked through where the line is. As long as she's genuinely present and engaged, we keep tapping her. But the line I've drawn is that we won't do it twice a week — she's opioid sensitive and needs a couple of days to fully recover each time, so twice a week would mean she only gets one good day out of seven. Right now, she's a day-by-day girl, and her internal medicine specialist sees her weekly.

The bigger point: give your dog the best care you can actually sustain. Not being able to sustain something — financially, physically, logistically — doesn't mean you don't care, and it's not a reason to let anyone shame you. That applies to cancer treatment too: if you can't sustain it, don't start it. Know your limits and don't apologize for them.

On the grooming pile-on this weekend: someone in the Arizona asked about shaving their veteran hound and got swarmed with "never shave your dog." I get why people default to that, but if you live somewhere like Phoenix and you have an older dog, stripping simply isn't realistic — it hurts, and they don't like it. My approach has been scissors and careful trimming rather than shaving, but I don't live in that climate, so I don't have to make that call.

And on rescue dogs in crisis: if someone's asking what to feed a malnourished rescue, please point them to a regional or national rescue coordinator rather than recommending food types and supplements. Malnutrition can come from a lot of different places — protein loss, pancreatic enzyme deficiency, liver shunt — and you need to know which before you know what to do. Liver shunt is worth ruling out first—be conservative with food until that's ruled out. Unless you're a vet, you're not in a position to diagnose from a Facebook thread. The Irish Wolfhound Foundation and IWCA both maintain rescue coordinator listings, and regional clubs can point you to one too.

There's a lot here we don't talk about enough — realistic puppy care, veteran care, quality of life, and yes, eventually, loss. These conversations are hard, but they matter, and we should be having more of them within this community. Get out with your dogs, enjoy them, and keep your routines going as much as you can.

Briget Wandruff, 58 years of a life with wolfhounds

Revisiting Epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds to Understand What Has Changed

4 min read • June 9, 2026

Epilepsy can be frightening for any dog owner. Seizures can strike without warning, turning an ordinary moment into one filled with confusion, fear, and helplessness. One minute, a dog is playing, resting, or walking through the house as usual, and the next, everything changes.

In dogs, epilepsy is the most common neurologic disorder, affecting approximately 1 in 100 dogs. The most common form is idiopathic epilepsy, meaning there is no identifiable underlying cause for the seizures. In many of these cases, veterinarians and researchers suspect genetics plays an important role.

Understanding epilepsy today requires more than relying on information from decades ago. Dogs, breeding practices, and veterinary care continue to evolve, meaning the way epilepsy appears, progresses, and responds to treatment may also change over time. Research must continually revisit these diseases to build a clearer and more accurate picture of what dogs and owners are facing now.

That is the focus of new AKC Canine Health Foundation-funded research led by Dr. Yoshihiko Yu at the University of Pennsylvania School of Veterinary Medicine.

A 20-Year Question Worth Asking Again

For nearly a decade, Dr. Yu has worked to advance scientific understanding of canine epilepsy. In earlier research focused on Pomeranians, he helped identify focal seizures in the breed, a type of seizure that affects only one part of the brain.

Now, Dr. Yu is turning his attention to Irish Wolfhounds.

Nearly 20 years ago, his PennVet colleague Dr. Margret Casel conducted a survey on epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds. In a study of nearly 800 dogs, she reported that almost 20% had idiopathic epilepsy and that affected Irish Wolfhounds lived, on average, two years less than their healthy peers.

“The high incidence of seizures in the Irish Wolfhound, along with the decreased longevity in affected animals, underscore the need for a breeding program designed to eliminate the disease from the breed,” Dr. Casel wrote in her 2006 paper.

Since then, no further research has revisited epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds. Dr. Yu believes now is the right time.

“During that time, our management of epilepsy has improved and changed,” he told CHF. “There are newer seizure drugs and newer diagnostic techniques available, and breeders have worked hard to exclude

dogs with epilepsy from breeding. So, there is a chance that the prevalence of idiopathic epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds has changed.”

Understanding Epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds Today

Working with the Irish Wolfhound Foundation, Dr. Yu will conduct a three-part nationwide study that includes owner questionnaires and additional clinical research. The first phase is a brief questionnaire designed to better understand prevalence by asking general questions about each dog, including whether the dog has seizures.

Dogs identified with seizures may then move into the second phase, which gathers more detailed information about the condition, including seizure type, treatment, how well seizures are controlled, and the impact epilepsy has on both the dog’s and owner’s quality of life.

The third phase focuses on future genetic discovery by collecting DNA samples from affected dogs to build a DNA archive. Researchers hope this resource will help identify genetic risk factors linked to epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds.

“We hope this study will provide the most updated picture of idiopathic epilepsy in Irish Wolfhounds in the United States,” Dr. Yu said.

Why Quality of Life Matters

For Dr. Yu, one of the most meaningful parts of the research is learning more about quality of life.

“Most studies focus on treatments but most people haven’t focused on their quality of life as much. Epilepsy can affect the entire household, not just the dog itself, so the owner wants to know about quality of life and real life information,” he told CHF.

That question matters. Research that listens to owners, studies affected dogs, and builds resources for future discovery helps turn concern into knowledge and knowledge into progress.

Your support helps CHF fund research that asks important questions for dogs and the families who love them. Help Turn the Tide on Epilepsy at [akcCHF.org/TurnTheTide](https://www.akcCHF.org/TurnTheTide).

<https://www.akcCHF.org/>

Canine Communication: Deciphering Different Dog Sounds

By Jennifer Nelson, Updated: Jun 16, 2026 **AKC**

“Wouldn’t it be great if our dogs could talk?” says Amanda Nascimento DVM, MSc, PhD. “If you listen closely, they can.”

Dogs don’t just bark to communicate. There are lots of different dog sounds our pups use to express how they feel, and some breeds vocalize differently. Sometimes, owners double as detectives in attempts to decipher the different sounds dogs make. Are they barking because they’re happy or are they alerting you to danger? And are they whining because they want you to play or is it because they don’t feel well?

It’s not as complicated as you might think. Some dogs vocalize more than others, and many can express several interesting sounds. Common ones we all know include barking, growling, whining, or crying. Determining when dog sounds are communicating pleasure, pain, excitement, or anger is something owners can work to accomplish.

Barking

We’ve all known a dog who loves to bark. Some bark more than others. Some have deep, rumbling barks, while others have yappy, high-pitched barks. Your dog may bark when they hear a noise or see something outside the window. They may also bark when the doorbell rings, someone comes home, or even to get your attention to indicate that they want to eat, play, or come in from outside.

As most dogs bark to communicate, this is likely among the common dog sounds your pup makes. “Many dogs have different barks that their people learn to differentiate over time,” says Nascimento.

Deciphering Barking

Once you’re used to your dog’s distinctive bark, it’s easier to understand what they mean. But clues like pitch, body language, and tail behavior can help. High-pitched barks may be welcoming, while deep barks may be your dog issuing an alert. A bark accompanied by a wagging tail often spells joy, while a crouched, angry bark with hackles up can indicate your dog is feeling fear or aggression.



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Whining

Whining or crying is another way dogs, especially puppies, express their needs. A dog might whine for you to take them outside, feed them, or playfetch. The high-pitched cry is often your dog’s way of expressing what they want or letting you know they’re unhappy. Dogs may whine when they’re scared (for example, during a thunderstorm), or if they have separation anxiety and are left alone.

Dogs may also whine when in pain. Think of a dog who steps on a burr and whines when they put their foot down. “Ow, that hurts,” the cry says. Conversely, some dogs can whine in excitement, such as when they are greeting you after a long day.

Deciphering Whining

Look for clues that can help you decipher what your dog's whine might mean. Is it dinnertime or do they need to go outside? Are they in pain or just unhappy being left alone?

Their body language, like crouching with their head or ears down, could mean pain. Some dogs whine in anticipation while you prepare their food or a treat. When you hear a whine, ask yourself, "What is my dog wishing for right now?" Look to body language to help figure it out.

Howling

Some breeds enjoy a good howl, while others don't often make these deep-throated dog sounds. The behavior is likely an evolutionary holdover from wolves. Howling is a way wolves communicate with their pack (for example, by guiding another wolf back to safety). Dogs are just trying to communicate, too.

Just like how your dog pees on or marks every branch they pass to let others know they were there, howling may be a way to claim territory. The howl can communicate things to other dogs, such as "I am here" or "This yard is mine."

Dogs can also howl to get attention. Or your dog might be triggered to howl by hearing other dogs in the neighborhood, a siren going by, or even music.



dageldog/Getty Images Plus via Getty Images

Deciphering Howling

Look at what your dog is doing when they howl. Is it a greeting? Have they found something? Or are they just announcing that they are rulers of their

domain? Some dogs may have pent-up energy they need to release — the same way a good scream can be cathartic for humans.

Purring

Think cats have the leg up on purring? Not so fast. Dogs sometimes purr, too. This throaty, “brrr” sound is often called a “rumble” by trainers and usually signals happiness. These dog sounds are usually a cross between a low rumble, a loud purr, and a grumbly growl.

Deciphering Purring

The best clue to distinguish what the purr means is to see when your dog does it. For most, it’s either an excited or happy noise, like when they’re about to go for a car ride. For others, it’s a noise that spells their total and utter contentment, such as when they’re lying next to you being petted.

Growling

Most of us instinctively know some of what the unpleasant sound of a dog growling indicates. Your dog can be afraid, angry, aggressive, possessive, or in pain and is warning you or someone else of their mood. Again, they’re communicating to you that something has them riled up. Some dogs also “play growl” — a lower, softer, rumbling growl that indicates they’re engaged with you or another dog in play.

Deciphering Growling

Growling can be one of the more concerning dog sounds. Since it can quickly escalate to snapping or biting, handling a growl takes finesse and may require the help of an experienced trainer.

Your dog gives off body language clues in their ears, tail, stance, and tone during a growl that can help you figure out whether the threat is serious or playful. In a study where humans listened to various types of growls, researchers found people are actually quite good at discerning when a growl is serious versus when it’s playful.



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Singing

Some vocal dogs try to sing along by howling to music or sounds on television. If a noise has the right pitch, like an operatic aria, your singing dog may belt out a chorus. Many owners with singers find it an endless amusement. But if you need to curb the behavior — for instance, if it bothers the neighbors — training can help.

One way trainers accomplish this is by exposing the dog to soft music that doesn't trigger singing. But if you want to encourage singing, dogs can be taught to croon on command, rewarded with treats for singing, or played their favorite trigger music to engage in song.

Deciphering Singing

We may never know why dogs sing, but experts think it's an instinctual reaction left over from their wild canine cousins, the wolves. Dogs aren't in pain or hearing something in a frequency that hurts their ears — most who engage in singing enjoy it, and so do their owners.

Many dogs learn that these noises get them certain results and continue to use them to talk to their owners. Dogs learn from repetition and use the noises that work best to get the results they want.

Nascimento describes how French Bulldogs can make sounds that resemble a scream. "In this way, they are teaching their humans to 'speak dog' to be able to communicate their wants and needs better."

Key Takeaways

- Dogs use a variety of sounds to communicate emotions, needs, and reactions
- Pitch, tone, and body language help clarify meaning
- Barking and whining often signal needs or excitement
- Howling and singing connect to instinct and ancestry
- Learning vocal patterns strengthens your bond



2026 Meeting and Events

January 11	Regular Meeting
February 8	Regular Meeting
March 2026	<u>St. Patrick's Day Parades</u>
• March 7	Alexandria, VA
• March 8	Annapolis, MD
• March 14	Manassas, VA
• March 14	Gaithersburg, MD
• March 15	Baltimore, MD
• March 21	Harrisburg, PA
March 8 & 9	<i>Irish Wolfhound Assoc of the Carolinas Specialty Durham Kennel Club, 7318 Guess Road, Durham NC</i>
March 14	Westminster Celtic Canter
March TBD	<i>Ellicott City Historic Downtown</i>
March 29 & 30	<i>Specialty Harford County Equestrian Center, Bel Air, MD (Meeting Following Judging)</i>
March 29	<i>Irish Wolfhound Association of Lake Erie Specialty New York State Fairgrounds</i>
April 17 & 18	Dills Celtic Festival, Dills Tavern, 237 Baltimore St, Dillsburg, PA
May 2 & 3	Faerie Festival Marshy Point Rocky Point Park in Baltimore County, MD. 2200 Rocky Point Rd, Essex
May 17	Show Wrap Up Meeting
May 18-21	<i>IWCA National Specialty Purina Farms St Louis, MO</i>
May 29 & 30	Annapolis Irish Festival, Anne Arundel County Fairgrounds, 1450 Crownsville, MD
June 13 & 14	Carroll County Celtic Festival, Carroll County Ag Center, Westminster, MD
June 21	Regular Meeting
June 20	Penn Mar Irish Festival, Shrewsbury, PA
June 27 & 28	<i>Celtic Fling (with a concert on Friday night) PA Renn Faire grounds</i>
August 9	Regular Meeting
September-13	Fun Day
September 19 & 20	<i>PA Renn Faire Shamrocks and Shenanigans Weekend</i>
October 4 & 5	<i>Irish Wolfhound Assoc of the Delaware Valley Specialty</i>
October 18	Regular Meeting
November 13, 14 & 15	Maryland Irish Festival, Timonium, MD
November 22	Regular Meeting
December 13	Holiday Party WE NEED A VOLUNTEER TO HOST or RESERVE A PLACE
December 12	<i>Druid Hill Winter Solstice 5Miler , Baltimore, MD</i>
December 28	<i>Military Bowl Parade, Annapolis, MD</i>

Dates, Time, or location to be determined and subject to change on some events.
Need Volunteers to Host meetings.

