

# **An Introduction to the Shiba Inu**

## **General Information on the Shiba Inu**

**Shiba Brochure written by Jacey Holden**



## **Introduction**



If you are already this far, you have probably caught your first glimpse of a Shiba. It may have been at a dog show, walking in a park, or just a picture in a book. Cute, huh? The Shiba is probably one of the most universally appealing of all breeds. It has the look toy manufacturers try to capture in their favorite stuffed animal, the teddy bear. But the Shiba is not a toy. It is a very lively little dog with a unique set of characteristics. Each one is an individual with his own personality, but there are some traits that are considered typical of the breed. Dog ownership is a long term commitment; not something that can be stuffed in the closet once the novelty wears off. A dog's love is for keeps.

## **A Brief History of the Shiba Inu**



Originally, Shibas were bred to flush birds and small game and were occasionally used to hunt wild boar. Now they are primarily kept as pets, both in Japan and the United States. There are more Shibas in Japan than any other breed. Around 7000 BC the ancestors of today's Shiba may have accompanied the earliest immigrants to Japan. Archaeological excavations of the shell-mounds left by the Jomonjin, or Rope-Pattern People (a name derived from the pattern found on their earthenware), show that they had small dogs in the 14 1/2 to 19 1/2 inch range. In the third

century BC, a new group of immigrants brought their dogs to Japan. These dogs then interbred with the descendants of the Jomonjin dogs, and produced canines known to have pointed, erect ears and curly or sickle tails.

In the 7th century AD, the Yamato Court established a dogkeeper's office that helps maintain the Japanese native breeds as an integral part of Japanese culture. Although the country was closed to foreigners from the 17th through 18th centuries, some European dogs and a breed known as the Chinese Chin were imported and crossed with native dogs living in the more populated areas. Dogs in the countryside, however, remained relatively pure. Originally there were three main varieties of Shiba; each named for its region of origin. Although similar, the Shibas from each area contributed to differences in breed type seen today. From the original Japanese native dogs, six distinct "breeds," in three different sizes developed.

They are:

\*Large Size - The Akita

\*Medium Size - The Kishu, Hokkaido, Shikoku, & Kai

\*Small Size - The Shiba

The small size dog has been called the Shiba since ancient times, with several theories surrounding the development of that name. One popular explanation is that the word Shiba means "brushwood," and the dogs were named for the brushwood bushes where they hunted. Another theory is that the fiery red color of the Shiba is the same as the autumn color of the brushwood leaves. A third conjecture is related to an obsolete meaning of the word shiba referring to its small size. These explanations are often combined and the Shiba is referred to as the "little brushwood dog."

World War II nearly spelled disaster for the Shiba, and most of the dogs that did not perish in bombing raids succumbed to distemper during the post-war years. While the Mino and Sanin Shibas became practically extinct, more of the Shinshu Shibas survived. After the war, Shibas

were brought from the remote countryside, and breeding programs were established. The remnants of the various bloodlines were combined to produce the breed as it is known today.

### **Physical Characteristics**

The Shiba is a very proportionate dog with a height to length ratio of 10 to 11. Males run from 14 1/2 to 16 1/2 inches tall, with females ranging from 13 1/2 to 15 1/2 inches. Height over the upper limits is a disqualification. The weight varies according to height up to about 25 pounds. It is a medium boned, moderately compact and well-muscled dog with a generally spitz-like appearance. Because of its hunting heritage, it is quick, agile and able to turn on a yen. It has a dense double coat similar to that of a husky. Although all colors are acceptable in the Shiba standard, red, red sesame (sable) and black and tan are preferred. White and cream shadings (urajiro) are present in the legs, belly, chest and part of the face and tail.

### **Temperament**



With a black button nose, little pricked ears and a curly tail, the Shiba enters the world knowing he is a superior being. Whether with intrepid boldness, squinty-eyed cuteness or calm dignity, he is king.

The Japanese have three words to describe the Shiba temperament. The first is "kan-i" which is bravery and boldness combined with composure and mental strength. The opposite side of "kan-i" is "ryosei" which means good nature with a gentle disposition. One cannot exist without the other. The charming side of the Shiba is "sobuku" which is artlessness with a refined and open spirit. They combine to make a personality that Shiba owners can only describe as "irresistible."

If a Shiba could only utter one word, it would probably be "mine." It is "mine" food, "mine" water, "mine" toys, "mine" sofa, "mine" crate, "mine" car, "mine" owner, and "mine" world. Sharing is a concept he feels others should practice. If the bait is dangled when a potential Shiba owner sees adults at a dog show or pictures in a magazine, the hook is set when he encounters his first puppy. They are exemplary examples of canine cuteness, fiery little fuzzballs-from-hell, no words can describe the appeal of the infant Shiba. A litter of Shibas is a Dakin™ Convention and a school of piranha; strutting, posturing little windup toys.

The adult Shiba is far from a toy. "Macho stud muffin" has been used to describe the male Shiba. The body may look "muffin," but the mind is all "macho stud." The Shiba takes the "spirited boldness part of his temperament quite seriously. Early socialization, temperament testing, and careful conditioning are mandatory for the young puppy. Dog aggression, especially in the un-neutered male, is a breed characteristic. This fiery aspect of the Shiba nature cannot be taken lightly.

Most Shiba owners learn to deal with the difficult aspects of the dog's temperament to enjoy the delightful ones. With "sobuku" the Shiba sets his hook into the heart. This is "artlessness" with squinty eyes, airplaned ears, and a vibrating tail. It is "charm" standing in your lap, washing your ears, and "dignity" plus "refinement" born of the knowledge of superiority.

### **Health Considerations**



As a breed, Shibas can rightfully be described as sturdy, healthy little dogs, able to withstand the rigors of outdoor life as well as enjoying the comfort of indoor dwelling. They are easy keepers, requiring no special diet other than good commercial dog food. They can run for miles with an athletic companion or take their exercise chasing a tennis ball around the back yard. Their catlike agility and resilience provide good resistance to injury, and the "natural" size and symmetrical proportions lessen susceptibility to conditions caused by structural imbalances.

Despite these assets, Shibas can have some hereditary defects, which all reputable breeders screen their breeding stock for. Patellar luxation is common in toy breeds and sometimes appears in Shibas. It causes loose kneecaps and is usually not severe enough to be detrimental to a pet. An experienced veterinarian can detect this condition by palpation. Moderate to severe patellar luxation can easily be corrected by surgery and the dog will lead a normal, healthy life. Hip dysplasia occasionally occurs, but it is not as serious in the Shiba as it is in large breeds of dog. Mild dysplasia will not show any adverse clinical effects and the dog will lead a normal life. Good breeders will not breed to any dog whose hips have not received a rating of "fair" or better from the Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA).

Responsible breeders also check their Shibas' eyes for hereditary eye defects. No breed of dog is totally free of hereditary eye defects. Few defects are severe enough to cause blindness or interfere with a dog's life, but dogs with eye defects that are potentially blinding, such as progressive retinal atrophy and juvenile cataracts should not be bred. The majority of eye defects do not impair the dog's ability to be a good pet.

Allergies, especially to fleas (see flea section of this page) are the frequent nemesis of dogs, and Shibas are prone to them too. With the advent of the newer flea preparations, the problems should be minimized. Other allergies require veterinary help. A rule of thumb: If the itching is from the shoulders back, it is probably fleas. If the itching is somewhere else, it may be something else.

Occasionally, a Shiba puppy may exhibit a heart murmur (an unusual sound to the heartbeat). Usually these go away without treatment, and there is no cause for alarm. If an adult has a heart murmur, it should not be used for breeding.

A smattering of other defects have been reported, but none in numbers to cause concern at this time. Reputable breeders do all they can to screen for serious disabling hereditary-problems for the first few years of life. Defects and will guarantee their puppies to be free of disabling hereditary problems for the first few years of life.

### **Where to Find A Shiba**

You have probably been admonished to buy from a reputable breeder. Where are they? You may look in the newspaper, but many of the best breeders use other methods of advertising. It is best to check with the National Shiba Club of America (NSCA) which is the national organization (parent club) for the Shiba. If you call the American Kennel Club (AKC), that organization will give you the address of the current secretary of the NSCA, or of the contact person for breed information. Breeders are listed in publications geared for the Shiba breed, as well as general "dog" magazines.

Let your best instincts guide you when choosing a breeder. Don't pick a puppy because you feel sorry for it or want to "rescue" it. This is an animal that will be sharing your life and the life of your family the next 12 years or so. Take your time. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't. Visit several breeders and pick one with whom you feel comfortable. Choose one who is willing to help you both before and after the sale. Since Shibas often aren't readily available, choose the breeder first and place a deposit on an upcoming litter. If possible, see the puppies as they develop. A breeder should not mind the visitation as he wishes to become acquainted with you too.

Unfortunately, as Shiba ownership becomes more widespread, some of them will end up in rescue services. There are several for the breed already. If you feel you could take one of these dogs, contact the NSCA Secretary or any reputable breeder who is a member of the NSCA. These people can put you in contact with the rescue organization in your area. Rescue dogs are usually nice dogs whose owners could no longer keep them. These dogs come already neutered, adjust readily to their new homes and usually cost less than a puppy.

Sometimes adults are available from breeders or people who have bought them as show dogs. For some reason, frequently size or dentition, the dog did not turn out to be a show dog. These dogs usually make outstanding pets as they have been carefully raised and are past the "puppy stage."

Sometimes, whether through impulse or frustration in trying to find a good breeder, people end up considering a pet store puppy. Puppies found in a pet store have been bred strictly for profit. Quality is seldom a criteria. People who breed these puppies do not know where they go and have no contact with the animal after it is sold to the pet store. It is not to say that a

nice puppy cannot be obtained through a pet store, but common sense dictates that it is better to work with someone who has the welfare of his puppies as his highest priority, not money.

### **For Additional Information**

Shiba fanciers dedicated to the breed and AKC recognition founded The National Shiba Club of America in 1983. In 1992, the NSCA was granted Parent Club status by the AKC. The Club is active in all aspects of the Shiba world. It hosts a National Specialty every year and sponsors two regional specialties. It has judging seminars, public education, and health and genetics committees. It also publishes a bi-monthly magazine of interest to all Shiba fanciers, called the Shiba-E-News.

### **Foreword**

If you are really considering taking the plunge, then the next section is for you. Don't forget that Shiba people get really crazy about their dogs and owning a Shiba is not just owning a dog, but a way of life.

### **Food**



Before bringing home your Shiba, it is best to have a supply of food on hand. Several boxes of granola, some oranges (for vitamin C) and a few sandwiches should give you enough energy to keep up with the little guy. Even though the Shiba would prefer to share your dinner, it is best to buy him a top quality dog food, one containing about 30% protein, and 15% to 18% fat. Do not think in terms of a human diet when feeding a puppy. An eight week old Shiba will eat approximately 1/3 cup of puppy food three times a day. He may be given this moistened in separate feedings, or, if he is not too greedy, he may have dry kibble available at all times. If he is being fed three times a day, gradually increase the food as he grows and his appetite increases. He may be cut to twice a day at about four months of age or if he loses interest in a meal. A healthy puppy is neither too fat nor too thin. You should be able to feel his ribs, backbone and hip bones, but not see them. An adult Shiba will eat from one to one and one half cups of kibble per day depending on his size and energy level.

## Housing

The Shiba is an excellent indoor/outdoor dog with a coat that will protect him from both heat and cold. He must have shelter from the sun in summer and storms in winter, but he can withstand a wide range of temperatures.

Unless you plan to give your Shiba all his exercise on a leash, a fenced yard is mandatory. Nothing is more devastating than discovering your beloved Shiba is a \$600.00 carpet remnant on the street in front of your house. No amount of training will deter your little hunting dog from darting across the street to chase the neighbor's cat - at just the wrong time. This is true of any breed of dog. Dogs also dig and some climb. Check frequently for possible escape routes. A Shiba is safest indoors or in an escape-proof run when you are away from home.

A Shiba lives with the principle - *su casa es mi casa*. He will want to sleep on your bed, eat at your table and rest in your favorite chair. A puppy will also wish to dismantle your VCR wiring, chew the straps off your sandals, round the corners of your kitchen cabinets, and if not watched closely, will definitely light up his life with the electric cords. If any of these behaviors disturbs you, you may wish to invest in a crate and possibly an exercise pen.

## Crate Training



All puppies should be crate trained. Crates are the best way to housebreak a puppy. They also provide a safe refuge during the night and when the puppy can't be watched. A size 200 airline crate (as pictured below) will suit a Shiba for his entire life and will also fit on the back seat of almost any car. He can ride safely in a crate in the car, and, with a little ingenuity, a crate can be seat belted or bungied into place.

When you're not home, you will never wonder where your puppy is or what he is doing if he is in a crate or exercise pen. Even though he may be exercised, keeping a puppy in a crate day and night is not good. It is akin to you staying in bed, going out jogging, and going back to bed again. While the puppy is small, a four by four foot exercise pen, setup in any room of the house, is an ideal place to leave the puppy while you are at work. This allows the puppy room to move around and play while keeping him safe and comfortable indoors. Putting a six by six foot piece of inexpensive linoleum under the pen will protect carpet and sensitive flooring. Later, when the Shiba is mature, he may be allowed free access to the house or yard. Exercise pens continue to be of great service even

when the puppy is grown. It can be used to block the puppy/dog from newly planted areas in the garden or prevent small children and puppies from reaching the Christmas tree. It can keep a dog's muddy paws off the sliding glass door, or keep them clean after bathing. You can even wrap it around yourself, the recliner, and the remote so no one can reach you during football season. Options are unlimited. Crates and exercise pens may be purchased at almost any pet supply store.

## **Exercise**

Shibas are an active breed, but don't need many acres on which to run. They can get adequate exercise banking off the couch and spinning broodies on the bed, but to get in good condition, they need additional activity. Dogs like to go for walks with their people, and for many Shibas it is more exciting than eating. A wheelchair-bound Shiba owner takes his two dogs for a "walk" every day around the streets of suburbia, and a competitive mountain bike rider has his Shiba run with him for miles as he trains for grueling competition. But, the majority of people snap on the retractable lead and make a morning (or evening) tour of the neighborhood. It is good exercise for both man and beast and a great way to make friends. Not everyone is responsible enough to keep his dog on leash. Watch for loose dogs roaming the area. A dog fight is not the best way to become acquainted with the neighbors.

## **Playtime with puppy**

Given a choice, a Shiba puppy will usually pick human body parts as his favorite chew toys. Fingers and toes are preferred, especially if covered with socks or sandals. He will enjoy ankles, pant legs and the ultimate - shoelaces on the shoes you are wearing. If you wish to expand his horizons and preserve your flesh, a visit to the pet supply store is a fine place to start. Hardware stores also carry a supply of delectable goodies such as the business end of a toilet plunger, handles for garden tools, and rubber galoshes. Around the house you may find old stuffed animals, socks that can be tied in knots, dirty sneakers, and tennis balls. A trip to the country can bring pine cones, sticks and oak galls which are excellent for dismembering outdoors. Shibas are not seriously destructive, but puppies are puppies, and puppies chew. Even adults like to gnaw on something occasionally. If your puppy chews the straps off your favorite sandals it will make you very angry, but don't take it out on him. It was your fault for leaving the sandals where the puppy could reach them.

Some Shiba puppies play quite gently while others are very rough. They are used to tussling with siblings that have protective coats of fur. Shibas will often grab your wrist as you start to pet them. This is just the same thing he would do to another puppy that had come up to play. His sharp baby teeth pierce the skin and you think the puppy is biting. Also, when a puppy is playing with your clothing, he does not realize that you are right under there and he will bite much harder than he does on bare skin. This can be especially hard on children.

The best way to control a problem is to avoid the situation that precipitates it. Do not play with the puppy in a manner that allows him to chew on you. Distraction is a good technique for luring a puppy away from potential problems. A firm "no" with a good shaking or rap on the nose may deter him from repeating unacceptable behavior. Sometimes you must be quite firm. It is best to remain calm and think of the puppy as an overexcited 18 month old child. If you or the puppy become irritable, a "time out" in his crate or pen will give you both a cooling off period. Take heart, the puppy will calm with age and you can always have a party when the puppy "fangs" fall out.

## Early Socialization



A trip to the mall or neighborhood park will bring you all the attention you can handle. This may be wonderful for a young man looking for a date, but it can be deadly for a small puppy. Until a puppy is fully immunized against parvovirus, at about the age of 20 weeks, it is not safe to take him to areas frequented by other dogs. Many people solve this problem by taking the dog to visit friends and relatives in "clean" environments and asking them to return the favor. Some Shibas may be shy of strangers while others are very outgoing. Some are quite playful and others are just dog aggressive. Early socialization is mandatory to obtain the best possible temperament from a puppy. Taking a risk on exposure to parvo is often a trade-off with the necessity of socialization. Think it out carefully and discuss it with the breeder as well as the veterinarian. Socialization does not end with puppy kindergarten. It is a lifelong process.

## Training



It is well established that if you are not somewhat trainable and flexible, you will have a difficult time adjusting to a Shiba. Shibas want their owners to come when called, fetch when they want food, stay off the furniture they want for a nap and speak whenever someone wants to talk about Shibas.

Owners too feel they should be able to make a few polite requests from their dogs. Sometimes there is a small power struggle, but the owner must establish that he is in control. Shibas, like teenagers, have very selective hearing. They can totally ignore your commands to come, but be there in a shot if they hear the lid on the cookie jar. They may do what you want when on leash and never look back when free. Shibas aren't stupid. They know just what you want them to do and whether they can get away without doing it.



Housebreaking is easy and something that Shibas do naturally. If a puppy is taken out whenever he awakes from a nap or after a meal, he will almost never soil in the house and especially not in a restricted area such as a crate. A puppy as young as five weeks can hold his bowels all night, but not his bladder. He will want out or will wet on a blanket or paper in his exercise pen. As soon as the puppy figures where "out" is, he will try to go there to potty. This becomes easy when there is a door directly to a back yard.

Leash breaking is not as natural for the Shiba as housebreaking. It involves something they truly detest - restraint. Some Shibas can carry around their dislike for collar and leash all their lives. They do it in the form of the patent "Shiba shake," where they cock their heads sideways, as if something was in their ear, then stop and shakes violently. Amazingly, this "ear problem" goes away as soon as the leash is removed, and returns the minute the dog is near the show ring.

To begin the leashbreaking process, it is best to put a soft snug collar and let the puppy wear it around for awhile. Attach a leash and let the puppy take you for a walk. You go where he goes. After a few times, you can suggest that he follow you. He may pull back and scream a little, but that is natural. Encouragement and praise help, and soon he will be walking with you. Never leave a choke collar on an unattended puppy and never tie up a dog with a choke collar. A dog can easily hang himself by a choke collar just by getting tangled in something as simple as a bush.

The fiery aspect of the Shiba temperament is apparent at an early age. Even as puppies they stage mock battles and make much noise as they vie for top honors. With people they are all kissy-face, but with other dogs, and especially other Shibas, they are macho little muffins. There is a wide range of variation in this aspect of a young Shiba's temperament and difficulties should be discussed with the breeder. Many Shiba puppies are just playful and not quarrelsome, but others are more serious.

Some like to play with other dogs once they are acquainted while others never seem to adjust. They all fall within the range of "normal" Shiba temperament.

Just as there are hundreds of books on child rearing, there are as many theories on how to deal with canine temperament. Dog trainers who are not familiar with the Shiba temperament may only make problems worse.

Shibas seem to work well with the reward system or "motivational method." They easily learn commands like sit, and down, and parlor tricks such as roll over, speak and sit up. Obedience work done on lead is readily acquired, but a Shiba who reliably "comes" on command in any situation is rare indeed. There are a few who learn boundaries, come when called, even when chasing a car, and can wander loose in any situation. These are exceptional and usually a combination of an extremely responsive temperament plus diligent training. It is realistic to expect that the average owner with the average Shiba will not have that situation. Most Shibas will not wander miles from home, but will want to investigate every nook and cranny within a larger radius that the owner is comfortable. Expect your Shiba to be an "on leash" breed and if he proves to be otherwise, then you are among the fortunate.

Do not feel your Shiba is untrainable, for he is not. Shibas love "agility" training, as it is a natural for their athletic ability. They are smart and enjoy activities that challenge their mind and body, easily becoming bored with excessive repetition. If you work with the Shiba nature rather than against it, training will be fun for both.

### **Shibas and Children**



The responsible Shiba owner asks himself what type of child would he like for his favorite dog. It would be a child with a good nature and stable temperament, one that was gentle and most of all, easy to train. A child of an extremely energetic nature or whose hearing is too selective may be better suited to a larger more docile breed. Intractable children should have animals made of plastic or, maybe cement.



All dogs, and especially puppies, regard very small children as peers rather than superiors. Puppies will try to play with children as they would another puppy, particularly if the child falls on the floor or runs around making squealing noises. Some Shibas are afraid of very young children and alarmed by their sounds and quick movements. They will run from a toddler or hide when it approaches. This can lead to a fear-biting situation if the child pursues a frightened dog.

The responsibility of how a puppy interacts with children falls on the parents. Most trainable children over six years of age should have no trouble adjusting to a Shiba puppy. Dog oriented people find it easy acclimating a Shiba to a household with children. People with little dog experience should visit several households with Shibas. Do not fall in love with a Shiba at a dog show and immediately run out and buy one. Take time to visit the dogs in the home environment. See how they react to children and let your intuition be your best guide. When adults visit a home with Shiba puppies, they usually sit and wait for the puppies to come to them. Children tend to pursue the puppies. Shibas do not like to be continually restrained and manhandled. Although a well socialized puppy will tolerate some of this, too much will make him shy or irritated. It is absolutely necessary that a child learn to sit and let the puppy come to him.

It is difficult to train a child, who is used to running in and out of the house at will, to close the door quickly and make sure the Shiba doesn't get out into an unfenced area. It is even more difficult to train the child's friends. Training the child when he is little can make him aware of the necessity of using a double door system or exercising caution when going in and out. But, ultimately, it is up to the parent to keep the puppy out of harm's way.

## **Veterinarians and Vaccinations**

Since Shibas are a healthy, hardy little breed, they seldom need trips to the vet except for routine vaccinations and an occasional teeth cleaning. Your new puppy should be taken to the vet of your choice within a few days of purchase. Most breeders require this as part of the puppy's health guarantee. The vet should check his overall condition, his heart for possible murmurs, and a stool sample for parasites. A puppy should already have had at least one vaccination from the breeder prior to his sale. You can set up a continued vaccination schedule with your vet during this first check-up.

Puppies should have a complete set of vaccinations before exposing them to situations where many other dogs have been. These vaccinations are against distemper, hepatitis, kennel cough, parvovirus and coronavirus. Often the first shots do not contain a vaccine against leptospirosis (lepto). Lepto has frequently been fingered as the "bad guy" in vaccine reaction. Many breeders and veterinarians prefer to wait until the puppy is three to four months old before giving an injection with lepto. Several Shiba puppies have experienced an anaphylactoid reaction to a vaccine on their second injection, even when it did not contain lepto. This is the same severe allergic reaction some people experience when stung by a bee. Epinephrine must be administered immediately, so a veterinarian should be warned of the possibility of a reaction. A puppy should remain in the waiting room of the vet's office for 15 to 20 minutes after his injection to ensure there is no reaction. Rabies shots are given at four months of age. Rabies is the only vaccination required by law. All others are for the puppy's health.

## **Spay and Neutering**



For many people, the decision to neuter a male dog is somehow tied into their own sexuality. Maybe it should be, for the amorous intentions of the stimulated male Shiba are only rivaled by those of Geraldo Rivera and Wilt Chamberlain. Neutering a male dog has a great effect on his temperament, if it is done at a very early age. Neutering a male before the age of five months will usually prevent marking and other "big guy" ideas. Sometimes it takes up to eight months or more for a Shiba male's testicles to drop into the scrotum. They seldom fail to arrive, and if the vet can locate them at all, he can perform the castration. Don't postpone it.

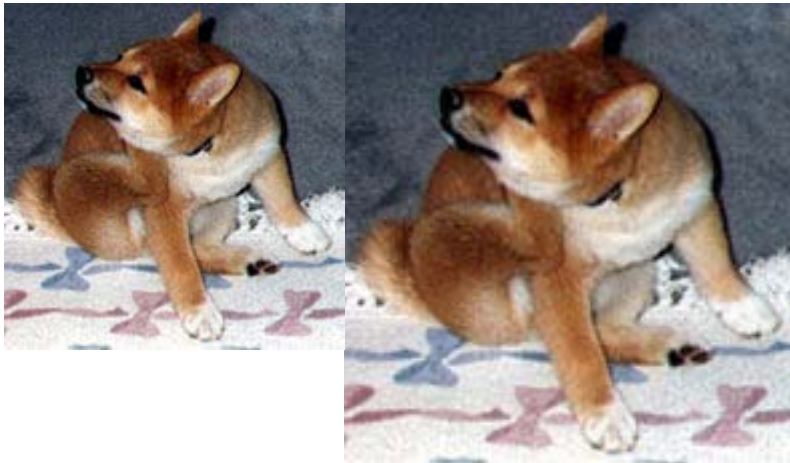
Many people would rather have a female as a pet. They see the female as having a gentler nature and not having the desire to continually mark territory. Spaying a female does little to change her basic temperament, it just prevents pregnancy. Females should be spayed at about five months of age before they have their first heat cycle. This makes it easier on the little girl as the uterus is small and the female lean. Recovery is quick and after a few days, you won't

know anything has been done. Both sexes make good pets and have equally affectionate natures.

### **Coat**

Shibas shed. You would too if you were wearing a wool coat in summer. All dogs with double coats shed, even Dobermans and Labradors. Those breeds with single coats that don't shed, such as poodles and some terriers, need clipping or constant brushing to keep their coats from matting. You have a choice - clip, brush or vacuum. Shibas generally "blow" coat twice a year, but neutered animals will frequently just shed a little bit at a time without shedding completely. It varies with individuals, but you can usually count on a Shiba to have a full coat for Christmas. A Shiba could go his whole life without every experiencing a brush, comb or bath and be just as healthy and happy. Shibas have little odor to their fur unless they have rolled in something pungent. Show dogs are often bathed weekly while pets are occasionally shampooed at the owner's whim. All seem to have healthy coats.

### **Fleas**



Fleas are the scourge of pet ownership. The flea most commonly found on the dog is the cat flea. Cats are flea farmers and outdoor cats spread fleas from yard to yard like dandelion seeds. Methods of treatment are so varied and controversial that they are a book in themselves. If fleas are eradicated from the environment, they will soon vanish from the dog. Fleas like warm, moist, sheltered surroundings and do not tolerate direct sun, dryness or extreme cold. Fleas do not survive outdoors in arid climates, but thrive in the warm, damp summers of the majority of the U.S.. To help create this dryness, the indoor environment can be treated with desiccating powders, and many professionals such as "Flea Busters" use these products with much success. It takes about six weeks for them to work. Most commercial flea products are toxic. How else could they kill the fleas? Start slow and work your way up to the "hard stuff."

There are some new and exciting products on the market for flea control. Personally, I am a little leery of using them on dogs used for breeding, but for pets, they are wonderful.

The first is a product called Program™, which renders the eggs of a female flea unable to hatch after she has bitten a dog that has taken the medication. It can be used in combination with topical medicines such as dips and powders, but does not prevent re-infestation from the

outside (the neighbor's cat). Also, the adult flea will continue to live out its life on the dog, grazing its way from tail to nose for about three months. This is enough time for a Shiba to go ballistic, even if it only has one flea.

The most exciting new product on the market is called Front Line™. It sounds almost too good to be true, and maybe it will turn out to be that way. Just a couple of drops on the dog's shoulder blades will kill the fleas before they even bite the dog, and one application is supposed to last one to three months depending on how much the dog is bathed. Check with your veterinarian for use and availability.

There is a similar product available throughout the country called Advantage™. It is applied in the same manner as Front Line™, but has a distasteful odor and does not last as long. Independent tests published in breed magazines report excellent success with both products. The products are expensive and only available from a veterinarian, but they may prove invaluable for the all-too-common flea allergic Shiba.

### **Collars & Tattooing**



It is a good idea for a Shiba to wear a collar with identification tags or plates attached. Some collar distributors will print the owner's phone number right on the collar in large letters that can be seen without touching the dog. Unfortunately, many Shibas that end up in the pound have lost their collars. Show dogs can't wear collars because it leaves a ring around the neck.

At this point, tattooing seems to be the best and most permanent methods of identification. The tattoo is usually placed on the inside of a dog's thigh. Although it is permanently attached to the dog, a person finding a lost dog may not look inside the dog's leg for a tattoo, and if he does look, may not know what to do about it. Hopefully most animal shelter personnel will look and know who to contact. The AKC is strongly encouraging all dog owners to tattoo their dogs for two reasons: One is the hope that a lost or stolen dog can be returned to its owner, and the other is for definitive identification. The second reason is because AKC wants it to be possible for any stranger to go into a household and identify the dogs. If the dogs are tattooed with the AKC registration number, the dogs can be identified with the registration papers or the records of the AKC. This would also assist in the dispute over ownership of a dog. The AKC registration number is like the dog's Social Security number; it's his identification for life.

The AKC is promoting the microchip as the wave of the future. It must be implanted by a veterinarian and needs a scanner to read it. The AKC has initiated the AKC Companion Animal Recovery Program. It registers both microchip and/or tattoo numbers for a small fee.

It also registers other animals that have been permanently identified. Call the AKC in Raleigh, NC for further information.

### **How To Learn More**

The best place to learn about Shibas is from other Shiba owners. There are no dumb questions. Just ask. The breeder of your puppy should be your primary source of information. Sometimes this is difficult as the breeder may live far away or be extremely hard to contact. Ask the breeder for names of other Shiba owners in your area and feel free to contact them. People love to talk about their dogs. Organize a gathering of Shiba owners in your area and have a potluck. It's a Shiba owner's support group!