



# Kuvasz Fanciers of America

*Presents*

## THE KUVASZ

Kuvasz Fanciers of America, Inc, a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, was founded in 1985 and has remained dedicated not just to the preservation and promotion of the Hungarian Kuvasz, but also to the support of ethical breeder conduct, rescue of Kuvasz in distress, public education, and sponsorship of Kuvasz events and activities. It is our great pleasure to introduce you to one of the oldest and most fascinating dog breeds in the world, *Canis familiaris undulans hungaricus*, the "Hungarian wavy-coated dog." A proud and highly intelligent dog, the beautiful white Kuvasz is an intensely self-assured, strong-willed breed that has performed for thousands of years as a livestock protector, watchdog, and steadfast companion.



**A juhász (The Shepherd)**

**Painter: Károly Sterio (1821-1862)**

It is important to do as much research as possible before bringing a Kuvasz into your life. If the Kuvasz is wrong for you, but you insist upon having one anyway, prepare yourself for misery, for the Kuvasz you buy on impulse will steal your heart and then break it when you have to find it a better home. However, if this magnificent dog is right for you and your family, being

loved and protected by a Kuvasz will be the most wonderful and unforgettable experience you will ever have with an animal.

In these FAQs, we'll tell you about the history of the Kuvasz and the challenges the breed faces today. We'll talk about selecting, raising, and training this most unique of all breeds. We'll answer some tough questions about the Kuvasz as honestly as we can. If we talk you out of buying a Kuvasz, that's okay. Remember, the decision to invite a Kuvasz into your life is only the first of many choices the Kuvasz owner will need to make; some delightful, some difficult. We want to help you make those choices the right ones for you and your Kuvasz

The Kuvasz [KOO-voss] is a member of the American Kennel Club's Working Group. Thought to descend from the Arabian wolf, the Kuvasz is likely one of the most ancient of dog breeds and is considered to be the ancestor of many livestock guardian breeds of Asiatic origin. Archaeological evidence places a dog of Kuvasz appearance in what is today North Iraq in 6600 BC, although the Kuvasz is thought to have existed as early as 9000 BC



**Returning Harvesters 1881- DEÁK-ÉBNER, Lajos**  
Oil on canvas, 94,5 x 131 cm  
Budapest Hungarian National Gallery

Several implausible theories have been published regarding the origin of the Kuvasz and its name. The breed likely borrowed its name from the ancient farmers of Russia, the Chuvash, who nurtured the Kuvasz for centuries and contributed many words pertaining to agriculture to the Hungarian language.

The Kuvasz arrived with nomadic tribes in Hungary's Carpathian Basin in 896 AD. It was used and bred first by herdsmen and shepherds, and later by Hungarian nobility. The most notable benefactor and breeder of the Kuvasz was the renowned and beloved King Mátyás, who ruled renaissance Hungary from 1458 - 1490. According to legend, King Mátyás kept at least one Kuvasz beside him at all times for protection from assassins. He also used packs of Kuvasz for hunting large game on his estates. Specially

selected puppies from the king's breeding kennels were given to favored noble visitors.

Centuries after the reign of King Mátyás, the Kuvasz remained the most popular of the unique native Hungarian dog breeds. Rural folk pooled their money and bought pairs of these expensive dogs to protect their entire village from bandits. In early twentieth-century Hungary, Kuvasz police dogs replaced foreign, less formidable breeds.

### **A WORKING DOG IN HUNGARY TODAY**



Notice the dog is chained to the tree and wears a collar of iron spikes.



The photographer gets too close

Sadly, a noble heritage and many devoted admirers could not protect the Kuvasz from the devastations of two world wars. Many heartbreaking accounts are told of these courageous dogs gallantly protecting their property, livestock, and families only to be shot by invading soldiers. Of those few who escaped slaughter, most later died of starvation in postwar food shortages. Hostile ethnic groups in neighboring countries massacred hapless local Kuvasz for being “Hungarian”. When breeders within Hungary were able at last to salvage the breed in the early 1950s, only twelve surviving Kuvasz could be found in the entire country, and all registration records had been destroyed.

## ONE KUVASZ

Prior to World War I, the Hungarian Kuvasz was a fashionable breed at home and abroad, and many were exported to Germany. As wars and bitterness separated the two countries, the German population



of Kuvasz became isolated from its Hungarian source. German breeders almost certainly introduced Great Pyrenees dogs into their Kuvasz breeding programs to bolster numbers. Compounding the problem, desperate Hungarian breeders imported and used German Kuvasz during their efforts to salvage the breed after World War II. Through judicious breeding the historically typical Kuvasz is thriving again not only in its native land, but also in Germany, the United States, and other countries worldwide. MEOE (Hungarian Kennel Club) Judge, Dr. András Kovács discusses this in his paper *The Kuvasz*.

<http://kuvaszinfo.com/wordpress1/kovacs-paper/>

**Q** When I went to an American Kennel Club dog show, I became very confused. The dogs competing in the Kuvasz ring looked like two or three different breeds. Are there several varieties of Kuvasz?

**A** There is only one real Hungarian Kuvasz, and it cannot be mistaken for any other dog breed. Bred to trot all day, chase and fight if necessary, it is a big, tall dog, but not a giant breed: its body is wolf like and slightly rectangular, with lean musculature, medium bone size, and long legs. Traditionally an outdoor sentry, the Kuvasz has an insulating double coat, harsh on the outside, soft and woolly beneath.



A natural, unexaggerated breed, there is no dewclaw removal, tail-docking, ear trimming, or other alterations to its appearance.

The Hungarian Kuvasz has an elegant, wedge-shaped head; whose distinguishing length is nearly half the height of the dog at the withers. The

bridge of the muzzle is level; the top skull is flat, and the ears are high-set and triangular. The eyes are dark and slanted slightly upward. Seen in profile, the planes of the bridge of the muzzle and the top of the skull are identical, and there is a characteristically subtle, almost invisible stop rising from the muzzle through the gentle forehead to the top of the skull. An equally characteristic furrow dissects up the middle of the top skull.

Although white animals are revered as benevolent spirits in Hungarian folklore, the creamy-white color of the Kuvasz coat evolved for more pragmatic reasons. Historically, the journey of the Kuvasz across Eurasia closely followed the journey of domesticated sheep. To be accepted rather than feared by sheep, the Kuvasz was bred to be sheep-like not just in size and general appearance but also in color.



Furthermore, for its own safety, the Kuvasz on guard had to be visible to the herdsman at night, in order to distinguish it from wolves or other predators. Finally, the medium-length coat of the Kuvasz was more than practical: it was beautiful. Wavy, harsh, odorless, and non-matting, its coat repelled dirt and water, requiring no special care to remain attractive. In conjunction with its contrasting dark, weather-resistant skin pigmentation, this rough yet luminous coat made the Kuvasz not just a hardy worker, but an object of pride and admiration.



**1980 photo of Charles Fabo with the outstanding sire Am/Can Ch. Budagyongye Opal, B.I.S. and Opal's daughter Csilla.**

A sexually dimorphic breed, the male Kuvasz is masculine and when mature develops a lion's mane around the neck and chest; the female Kuvasz is feminine, with a more finely chiseled head and smaller bone size.

The ideal height of a male Kuvasz is 28-30," with males under 26" being disqualified. The ideal female Kuvasz is between 26-28" tall, those under 24" being disqualified.

A male should weigh 100-115 pounds, weight correlating with height. A female Kuvasz should weigh 70-90 pounds, weight and height in correlation. Many Kuvasz are considerably taller and heavier, occasionally reaching great size.

There is no upper limit on height or weight in the American Kennel Club standard, though there is an *ideal* height defined by the AKC Kuvasz breed standard.

**Judge examining the bite at a 1970's dog show in Hungary**



## **KUVASZ IN THE UNITED STATES**

During its glory days, the Kuvasz gained favor in the United States. It was accepted for registry by the American Kennel Club in 1931, but due to the Depression and World War II, puppies were infrequently produced and the population failed to stabilize until importation resumed in the 1960s. However, obtaining a Kuvasz from behind what was then Hungary's Iron Curtain presented substantial difficulties for North Americans. Importing a Kuvasz from Western Europe was much easier, and most Kuvasz in Canada and the United States during the period prior to 1970 derived primarily from German and Austrian bloodlines.

The breed was in virtual infancy in the United States in the 1970s and almost all of its owners were newcomers to the breed. The Kuvasz Club of



America (KCA) was formed, and recognized as the parent Kuvasz club by AKC. In 1974, a standards committee of KCA was formed to write the Kuvasz breed standard, the ideal by which kuvasz would be judged in the AKC show ring for decades to come.

## **PERSONALITY**

The Kuvasz is bold, strong-willed, confident, clever, independent and manipulative, and is not suited for the nonassertive owner. For thousands of years, it has been used for predator control and as a bodyguard. Because of these traditional duties, the Kuvasz personality is unique. Training techniques and care will differ according to the purpose the dog will serve.



If the Kuvasz will be a companion (and this includes the show dog), early obedience training and vigorous socialization are critical. If your lifestyle is too busy to allow you ample time to pursue these activities with your puppy, the Kuvasz is not for you. It is primarily a one-family dog, fiercely loyal and devoted to its owners. The Kuvasz is very strong, very fast, very tough and very stubborn, yet with its own family is calm, playful, clownish, and affectionate. Despite its rugged exterior, the Kuvasz is extremely sensitive and forms deep and enduring emotional attachments to its loved ones. For this reason, ownership of a Kuvasz must be considered a serious and permanent commitment, and care should be taken to include the companion Kuvasz in family home life and activities.



**Q** How hard is it to obedience train a Kuvasz

**A** Kuvasz are deviously clever and will attempt to modify or neutralize your training efforts if you bore them with mindless repetition. Use your imagination to vary your practice routine, and persevere! Although they are quite capable of creating fun in

activities of their own invention, Kuvasz are highly intelligent and while challenging, are intriguing to train if the owner is more creative and persistent than the dog. Due to their independent natures, Kuvasz aren't typically candidates for performance stardom like Golden Retrievers or Border Collies, but they can excel if they are motivated. Some are motivated by praise, and some are motivated by food. Some are eager to please and are devastated by a stern vocal reprimand; others are as cooperative as a dirt clod. Consistency, patience, a sense of humor, and a generous reward system are the most effective tools when training a Kuvasz. Harsh or unfair training methods



will not be forgotten by your Kuvasz, who will always associate training with punishment and misery if handled unjustly.

It is essential that you begin obedience training your puppy prior to six months of age in a group, *Puppy Kindergarten* class. Puppies are ready to train in a sanitary environment when they are eight weeks old. Private in-home training or "boarding school" are not suitable for the Kuvasz personality and won't accomplish the desired objective. Your puppy needs to learn to obey you, not a stranger, and needs to learn to behave politely around other dogs; you need to learn how to properly train your Kuvasz.



## HEALTH CONCERNS

Almost all Kuvasz live long, healthy lives. However, like all large dog breeds, the Kuvasz is at risk for orthopedic diseases like hip dysplasia (HD) elbow



dysplasia (ED) and osteochondritis dissecans (OCD), each of which can result in mild to severe lameness and arthritic remodeling of the hip, elbow, knee or shoulder joints. Excessive weight gain, inappropriate supplementation of the diet, and

skeletal or muscle injuries in growing puppies increase the likelihood of occurrence and severity of these conditions. Because the Kuvasz has a long body and a deep chest, it can be subject to gastric dilatation and volvulus (GDV), commonly called "bloat," and sensible lifestyle management is essential. The use of DNA testing can enable breeders to manage and eliminate the incidence of Progressive Retinal Atrophy (PRA) in Kuvasz. Autoimmune Thyroiditis (AT) while easily and inexpensively treatable is sadly common in the breed and its genetic root currently evades us.

## BUYING A PUPPY

Kuvasz are almost never sold in pet shops because they do poorly as commodities in wholesale breeding operations ("puppy mills"). Without human affection, socialization, and a job to do, they can develop emotional problems and become depressed or unmanageable. It is highly recommended that the buyer go to the breeder's home to see how the puppies are being raised. Ask to visit with all the breeders' dogs; the puppy you bring home is likely to be much like the dogs you meet there. If you cannot go yourself, see if a friend or relative living near the breeder will go, and seriously consider their opinions. While genetics is known to account

for breed characteristics that define one breed from another, and thus also determine temperament and predictable behaviors, a bad start in the wrong environment makes all the more challenging the raising of a confident Kuvasz.

When shopping for a puppy, insist on meeting the dam and the sire if he is on the premises or nearby. THIS adult Kuvasz is the dog you will be living with for many years; it is NOT that adorable little snowball you see in the puppy room.



Puppy buyers should access the health clearance database at Orthopedic Foundation for Animals (OFA) <http://offa.org> to search the ancestry of their potential puppy. Do not trust any breeder who says, "I haven't seen that problem in my lines." Search for yourself. Understand that not all potential canine diseases are testable, though not testing for what we can test for is unacceptable. Know that the more health clearances your puppy's relatives hold across generations as well as pedigree is your best chance of finding a puppy that will be a healthy adult. Furthermore, be aware that listing negative results is voluntary and many breeders choose not to reveal negative results for their dogs. Ask why if it seems all their other dogs show clearances for a certain condition, but not this or that one. As outlined above in the HEALTH CONCERNS section, there are a few health issues we deal with in Kuvasz. Any breeder should enthusiastically endorse these tests and willingly provide you with proof of all certifications. If they do not, go elsewhere. Appreciate that the Kuvasz gene pool is limited, and there are no perfect dogs of any breed. Conscientious breeders must often

make the decision to breed an animal that is otherwise so valuable to the breed despite a less than stellar compliment of clearances.

When selecting a Kuvasz puppy, take your time and compare what breeders have to offer for the price they are asking and the demands they are making. Be prepared to place a cash deposit to reserve a puppy and to wait for up to a year for that special litter from a quality breeding. You should expect to pay about \$1200-1500 for a pet and about \$1800-2500 for



a show-breeding potential puppy. Some breeders may ask higher prices; many Kuvasz share similar ancestors and exorbitant prices or ridiculously demanding contracts are no guarantee of a better puppy. Expect a rigorous contract, one that makes demands of the buyer, but also spells out clearly what refunds, rebates, and conditions the

breeder is held liable for. If a contract protects only the breeder, go elsewhere for your puppy.

Some breeders may insist on co-owning your puppy, force you to breed your female, and demand a number of future puppies back or unlimited future stud services. If a breeder seems to place priority on profits instead of the welfare of you and your Kuvasz, go elsewhere. Find a breeder who impresses you with knowledge of the breed, cooperative attitude, ethical practices, and concern for the future of your Kuvasz and your satisfaction. Good breeders sell puppies whose health and temperament are guaranteed with a written sales contract, permanently ID their puppies, usually with microchips, which are registered in a national database, answer your phone calls and emails promptly, and want their puppy back at any age if you are no longer able to keep it.

## THE FAMILY KUVASZ

**Q** I want a dog who is well-behaved around children and guests in my home. I know socialization and training are required, but can a Kuvasz adapt to my hectic lifestyle?

**A** If you are choosing a dog primarily for your children, Collies, Labradors, and Golden Retrievers are also big, intelligent, and beautiful - and are much better choices for the average family.



Children must be trained that a dog is not a toy and must be treated with kindness and respect. All Kuvasz puppies as part of their upbringing and exposure to the world around them, whether intended to live with children or not, should experience the rough-and-tumble of children at play, so they never misinterpret that behavior as something they should step in the middle of. Even so, most Kuvasz will cope with behavior from children that would not be tolerated from adults, and many Kuvasz will assume the role of babysitter of the family children. However, other neighborhood children may present problems if they, too, have not been trained to respect your dog. Children must not be left unsupervised with any animal, including the family Kuvasz. Managing the environment is usually much easier than managing children. Confine the dog safely in a crate, kennel run, or room that children can't open. Do not expect the dog to have more common sense than the child

Your Kuvasz will develop the intelligence, emotions, playfulness, cleverness, stubbornness, and mischievous nature of a six-year-old child. Some are very protective, loving, and mellow, while others are very protective, loving, and total brats who steal socks out of the hamper, shoes out of the closet, dish towels off the kitchen counter, and remote controls and cell phones wherever they can find them; "If I can reach it, it's a dog toy!".

Like a child, if you have properly trained and socialized your Kuvasz, it will be polite, well-behaved, friendly and gracious around your guests. The Kuvasz will bark and lunge at strangers from behind his fence, but when his

owners assure him, "This person is okay with us and you can relax now," he runs to get one of his toys to drop at the visitor's feet. He wasn't trained to do this; he just does.

## THE LIVESTOCK GUARDIAN

**Q** I live in the suburbs, up against the foothills. Coyotes have carried off one of my cats; my neighbors have had small dogs dragged away right in front of them! I'm worried about the rest of my cats and of course, my children. Will a kuvasz stop this?



**A** Though the Kuvasz will push its charges from danger, it does not herd them, instead it typically

works at a distance from them, watchful for trouble and ready to frighten, chase, or if challenged, kill predators. A very visually acute dog, the Kuvasz will also protect from dangers in the air, being alert to hawks, owls, and eagles. Kuvasz are perimeter runners, checking the fence line at regular intervals to ensure no breach has occurred. After inspecting the perimeter, the Kuvasz will choose a high vantage point on your property, whether a hill or your patio deck, to snooze with one eye open, constantly watching for changes in his environment that need to be investigated. The perfect livestock guardian never has to engage a predator, but rather it's presence persuades the local predators to stick to their natural food sources of rabbits, field mice and carrion, leaving the lambs and calves as well as pet cats and small dogs be.





When properly selected, the instinctively protective companion Kuvasz can easily perform a dual role as a family pet and a part-time livestock guardian, alternating between the home and the livestock. Try to find a breeder who raises puppies around livestock and who knows which pups display the temperament required in a livestock guardian. Remember, the Kuvasz is the only member of the old Eurasian guarding breeds who was also developed as a hunting dog. Kuvasz were often left alone with the flock, so the dog had to find its own food. A careful mix of a prey drive to feed oneself and pastoral tendencies to protect its charges is the heart of the Livestock Guardian Kuvasz. Both tendencies and combinations of them are normal and natural, and both will appear in every Kuvasz litter.

Whether it will be used as a part-time or full-time livestock guardian, the puppy should be raised with gentle animals, which will not intimidate or injure it. There are many different theories and training methods, and the Livestock Guardian Dog Association <http://lgd.org/> is available to advise you, as should your breeder if selling LGD potential puppies.

## THE RIGHT DOG FOR YOU

**Q** My spouse is apprehensive about owning a guardian dog. Will a Kuvasz obey all our family members, even if some don't like it or are afraid of it?

**A** Everyone in the home needs be in agreement about bringing a Kuvasz into the family. Although Kuvasz are usually very tolerant of children, a jealous child can



create severe problems by covertly abusing the dog: does your child want the dog, too? Your clever Kuvasz will quickly recognize hostile individuals and may test them relentlessly. If some members of your household leadership structure (pack order) are not willing to interact with and assert dominance over the Kuvasz, the dog may feel justified in moving up the hierarchy to assume dominance over them. If anyone in the home is



fearful or dislikes disciplining and controlling a dog, do everyone, including the dog a favor and don't buy a Kuvasz

**Q** Do They Shed?

**A** Resistance is futile.

**TELL ME MORE.....**

**Q** My house has a nice view and I don't want to block it with a fence. Is it true that Kuvasz don't wander?



**A** The Kuvasz is a guardian dog, bred to instinctively protect anything within its territory. Without a clearly defined boundary like a fence, your Kuvasz will vigorously expand its territory, and the possibilities are endless... Your Kuvasz is not "roaming"; it is conquering new frontiers and enlarging its kingdom. Not only does this go over poorly with your neighbors, but the only car that comes down the road all day WILL run over your unfenced dog.

**Q** Will my Kuvasz bark at insects, birds, and the wind ?

**A** Usually not, but some do. Some will sleep at the foot of the bed and bark only enough to alert the family, then stop. Others prefer to sleep outside to guard their kingdoms. Different Guardian breeds are hard-wired to guard differently. The Great Pyrenees will lie in one place and bark at the air, alerting anything within earshot to stay away. The Kuvasz, as a visual guardian and perimeter runner, is able to learn what is normal in its environment, and notices any changes. If your living room is rarely redecorated, yet you change a lampshade, your Kuvasz will enter the room and stop short, scanning the room for what has changed. Upon spotting the new lampshade, your Kuvasz will likely go to it, assure himself it is not a threat and go about his business of demanding your ear rubbing.

Do remember that a guardian dog is supposed to bark. Once aware of a threat, the Kuvasz style is "prevention by intimidation," and almost all threats can be neutralized by a blood-curdling bark. One Kuvasz stood up on the bed at 2 AM and barked out the window. Her owners told her to be

quiet and go back to sleep, which she obligingly did. The next morning they discovered that their car had been broken into and the radio stolen. They'll listen to their Kuvasz next time.

Most Kuvasz sound off only for good reasons, but a good reason in your dog's opinion may be the UPS truck, cyclists, evil joggers, or the iguana next door. Be aware that your Kuvasz will also protect the houses next to yours, the house in front of yours, and the house behind yours. If your neighbors cannot accept a moderate amount of barking, don't buy a Kuvasz. At least one neighbor was profoundly grateful for the Kuvasz next door. The Kuvasz barking, the neighbor barked back at the Kuvasz to quiet, but she did not. The neighbor realizing this was a significant change from this dog, went outside to find an "education supplies salesman" trying to break into her side garage door.

**Q** Will I need a personal trainer to keep up with my dog?

**A** Although they are athletic and can be superb runners, swimmers, backpackers, and carting dogs, Kuvasz are not hyperactive and adjust to your



lifestyle easily. If you are very active, they will be able to keep up with you, then sleep soundly for hours. If you like to do nothing, they will do that with you too, and then sleep soundly for hours. Young dogs should not be over exercised until their bones are fully developed at about 2 years of age.

Please visit our recently remodeled website, [kuvaszinfo.com](http://kuvaszinfo.com) for our latest news, information, events and to make donations.

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<https://www.facebook.com/KuvaszFanciers>