

# Choosing the Right Collar and Leash For Your Dog

How do you choose the best dog collar, harness or leash?

It seems pretty simple: you just want to take your dog for a walk, but what kind of collar should she wear? Or should she use a harness? Or both? What about leashes--does she need a regular leash or a retractable one?

As is the case with picking out dog food, there are plenty of choices, and they can often be overwhelming and confusing. Here are our suggestions:



## *Collars*

It is best practice to always have your dog wear a collar, displaying a rabies tag and an identification tag with your contact information plus his or her microchip tag, just in case you get separated. There are many different types of collars available--including training, reflective, martingale and flat. All come in a variety of colors, patterns and styles--but the most important factors are size, weight and fit.

Two common types of collars are flat collars and martingale collars. Flat collars with buckles are the most common. Flat collars are effective for many dogs and come in a variety of materials. Nylon collars are ideal for growing puppies because they typically cost less. Flat collars also come in leather. Leather collars require frequent treatment to keep the leather soft, supple and strong to prevent cracking. If you have a long-haired dog, consider buying a rolled leather collar to keep her hair from matting. If your dog is well-behaved and you are very comfortable with them on a leash, a flat collar is the way to go. For dogs that rough-house together, a quick release plastic buckle is a good safety measure in case the dogs get tangled.



Martingale collars were originally designed for use in breeds like sight hounds, since their neck widths are often equal to or wider than their heads. It can be quite easy for these breeds to slip out of a flat collar, but a martingale collar prevents this by means of an extra loop that can softly tighten and stay snug against the neck if the dog tries to pull away. The use of martingale collars

has gained popularity in other breeds for training purposes or for dogs that have a habit of trying to slip out of a flat collar.

Your dog's collar should ride on her neck, but not be so loose that it slides down to her shoulder blades. For her safety, the collar should not be loose enough to slip over her head. It should be snug, but with enough room to easily fit two fingers between the collar and your dog's neck. If it's too loose, your dog could wiggle out. If it's too tight, it could rub against her skin and hurt her.

For dogs that are especially difficult to control on a leash or who are undergoing training supervised by a professional trainer, a training collar might be an option. We do use training collars on some of our large dogs when they go through training with our trainer. We do not recommend the use of a training collar unless you are working with a professional.



Harnesses are an excellent choice for puppies, small dogs or dogs with delicate throats that may be irritated by the use of a regular collar. They are placed around the dog's chest and rib cage---and therefore have more points of contact. This provides fewer opportunities for escape



than when the leash is secured to a collar. The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) suggests that some harnesses may reduce issues of pulling in some dogs. But for other dogs, the opposite may be true, and certain harnesses also have the potential to increase a dog's desire to pull, as she will no longer find it uncomfortable to do so. To choose a correctly fitting harness, you'll need to know your dog's general weight range, and possibly a few measurements. Make sure the harness doesn't pinch your dog anywhere. There are different types of harnesses available for many different needs, but remember that they are not usually suited well for dogs who really love to pull on the leash.

## ***Leashes***

Should you choose a regular (flat) leash or a retractable leash? They come in a variety of materials, lengths, thicknesses and colors to match your dog's collar. Standard flat leashes are usually 4-6 feet long and are made of washable nylon or leather. The advantage of a flat leash is that it allows you to maintain direct, constant control over your dog, which is an important safety factor, especially if you have a puppy or if you walk your dog in busy areas.

Retractable leashes can extend a great distance (13-26 feet) and allow your dog more freedom to explore but they are best suited for dogs that have been well-trained to walk on a leash since they have the ability to wander further away from you. ***You should never use a retractable leash when there are other people around as the probability of someone getting hurt is very high. This means, no retractable leashes in public places—not the park, around the neighborhood, or at the pet store!***

A six-foot leash is a standard starting leash for puppies or adult dogs. Nylon leashes often work better for puppies because they're lighter and more expendable. Nylon leashes are also stronger than their leather counterparts and may be a better choice for heavier/stronger dogs. The stitching or braiding near the handle and the metal clasp that attaches to the collar should be solid and durable and appropriate for the weight of your dog. Regardless of the type of leash you choose, remember to thoroughly inspect the clasp on your leash before each walk to ensure the safety of you and your dog.

There are even more products available to customize your walking experience. To learn more about walking your dog on a loose leash, consider enrolling in an interactive dog training class with a certified professional dog trainer.

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