

WHAT YOU SEE ISN'T ALWAYS WHAT YOU GET!  
(Is a Westie Really for you?)

A Westie is not a Golden Retriever or a Lab. Westies WERE bred as hunting dogs but with a whole different function. Many breeds known as hunting dogs today go on the hunting trip, flush out game, and fetch the game after the hunter kills it. Their job is to be very obedient. They basically let the hunter do the thinking. They do what they are told to do. They do not touch the game while it is alive. They handle it very gently when they retrieve it. This game is intended for the Master's dinner table.

A Westie is a whole other ball game. The game Westies were bred to go after were "vermin". The Master was usually a farmer. He generally did not intend to eat the game. He simply wanted it GONE. Westies hunted in packs. They, of course, did have to obey some commands but very often the commands were ones which instructed them to actively engage the game. Westies are small dogs so that they can fit into the dens of the animals they hunt, even if they are in holes underground. Westies have very large jaws relative to their size because when the Westie is underground and facing a critter that is often larger than they are, they must be able to kill it quickly. Westies must be able to do their own thinking, independent of their Master. The Master is not underground with them to tell them what to do. Their lives depend on their ability to think for themselves and to use their instincts to kill whatever might be in that den.

Now translate all of this to today's world. The Westie is a clever little dog. He loves his Master. **He will often do as he is told.** But pleasing the Master is often only a pleasant coincidence when the Master happens to want the same thing the Westie wants! Westies cannot be successfully handled and trained in the same manner as a Golden or other non-terriers. Their minds don't work in the same manner. Their needs are met in different ways. Westies do a great deal of independent thinking and decision-making.

WESTIES ARE FEISTY LITTLE DOGS! Yes, they look sweet and cute and like they couldn't hurt a flea! But Westies are bred, first and foremost, to kill critters. Their instincts do not make for a laid-back, quiet little dog. Their instincts must be considered in all of your interactions. If you want a dog who will do exactly as told; not think for themselves; are heavily rewarded internally for pleasing their Master, **you DO NOT want a Westie!!!!** (Yes, there is sometimes a Westie who seems this way but they are rare and not typical of the breed. They are often the result of a great deal of training effort by their owners who understand their breed.)

When interacting with a Westie, you must always take their breeding and instincts into consideration. When you get your Westie from Rescue, you will have an adult dog (or sometimes a teenager) whose mind is already "shaped". Even if you get a puppy, the Westie instincts are there. This doesn't mean you can't train and change your Westie's behavior....to some extent. But while doing this training, you must be prepared to deal with their basic nature.

If your Westie hides under your bed or your dining room table (or other places such as in his crate, behind the couch, etc.), think of a Westie in a den. He has put himself in a place that he may well feel a need to "protect". If he is upset, being in this close space may make him feel "cornered". **KEEP YOUR HANDS OUT OF THAT DEN!!!!** Even the nicest Westie may temporarily be beyond "thinking" and simply react in defense. Even the sweetest Westie who doesn't want a bath, may snap at that hand. You do not NEED to touch the Westie to get him to come out. (This is not a breed-specific issue but it is something you need to keep in mind with any dog.)

Think about what your Westie likes most. Is your Westie food driven? Walk to the refrigerator and open the door. If that isn't enough, take out a bag of cheese. Rattle the bag. Still no Westie? Take some of that cheese and go back to the "den". Lay a trail of tiny bits of cheese leading well

out from the hiding spot. Toss some close enough for him to eat it without moving so as to whet his appetite. Then walk away. Take the cheese bag with you. Sit down and wait. Westie will probably come out when he feels you are not right there to grab him. He will follow that trail of cheese leading to you. As he nears, reach in and get another piece. Rattle the bag a bit (but not enough to scare him off). Before you know it he will be sitting in front of you begging for goodies. If your Westie is the rare one who is not food driven, find something else he likes. How about getting out his leash and let him see you putting on your shoes. Most Westies will come running at the thought of a walk. Is it toys he prefers? Roll the ball by him. Bounce it noisily at a distance from the "den". Find what he wants most and be patient. (If he was under your bed, it would be a good idea to close off the bedroom from him so as to prevent this from happening again. You can easily live in a house where the bedroom doors are kept closed and you will have removed this easy retreat.)

Is your dog jumping on the furniture when you would prefer he wait for permission. Next time he does it, don't touch him to get him off. Get up and walk away. Call him if he doesn't follow you naturally. Lure him with a toy or treat. When he gets off, go back, sit down and then invite him up. He will learn and you won't cause him to associate your hands with negative things.

Does your Westie dislike being lifted? Then be sure you don't surprise him with this action. Always approach from in front when you are going to lift the dog. Bring a treat with you. Tell him what you plan to do, let him see the treat. Lift him with full support (not just beneath the front legs.) If you scoop the dog up with one arm supporting the rear and the other arm supporting the front, it gives them more of a feeling of security. Some put a finger through the collar at the back so they can better control the head snap. If your Westie dislikes being lifted, it will be worth your time and effort to practice this in small increments. For example, lift him from the floor to something that is only a few inches off the floor. Do it carefully. Give lots of warning. Give calming signals such as "good boy", "easy", etc. And when he is able to be lifted a few inches without a growl, give lots of treats and praise. Do it at this level for a few days until he can handle it and then raise the level to a foot or two, and repeat the process. Make this a game with lots of good rewards and he will learn to deal with it. But never surprise him with a lift.

Does your Westie snap at your feet? Remember those critter instincts. And remember that you have been playing with toys by making the toy move. Your feet are moving and it triggers off the same instincts that he would have if a mouse ran past him or you rolled a ball past him. Most dogs go through this stage as puppies and then outgrow it. If your dog hasn't learned better, you need to work on it. Don't wear shoes with things that dangle. Put your slippers with the bows away for a while. Practice walking by him. If he goes for your feet, use an "uh uh" sound coming from deep in your throat. (Sound like mommy dog if you can). Distract him by tossing a toy in another direction. But don't solve this by leaning down and pushing him away with your hands OR by pushing him away with your feet.

I think you are getting it now. **When in doubt, don't put your hands in the dog's mouth!!** Use other means to get what you want and make the dog think that this is a great new game that he wants to enjoy. Remember that a dog will learn better to not do something if he just doesn't get the opportunity to do it. Avoiding the situation and not triggering the bad response will get you much further in the long run than trying to power your way to getting what you want. Force begets force....just what you don't want.

A Westie can be a wonderful pet but you must understand what you are dealing with. If this is more than you and your family can handle, don't get a Westie. We recommend "Paws to Consider" by Brian Kilcommons and Sarah Wilson as a great resource book for finding the breed that really does meet your needs.