

Feists and Curs

Natural Squirrel Dogs

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Squirrel dogs can come from just about any breed of dog. However, dogs that excel at hunting other game make poor squirrel dogs. The most popular breeds that have the best reputation for developing the drive and desire to hunt and tree squirrels are feists and curs. These breeds have the natural traits needed for squirrel hunting. Dogs that use this natural instinct to hunt and tree squirrels are prized by their owners. It is important that those genes are preserved through their offspring and passed down to future generations of squirrel dogs.



Feist

TIM COSBY

Popular Breeds

The feist is a small dog usually weighing less than 30 pounds and standing 10 to 18 inches high at the shoulder. Generally, feists have short hair with a variation of solid or mixed colors. The traits that make the feist breed an excellent squirrel dog are their abundant energy, keen sense of smell and the ability to hunt with eyes and ears alert. These small dogs make excellent companions and form tight relationships with their owners. This bond makes these dogs more responsive to commands and requires less discipline.

Another popular breed of dog that makes an excellent squirrel dog is the cur. Sometimes the word cur is used to mean something low or worthless, but to those who know the history and attributes of the cur dog breed, nothing could be further from the truth. This breed was developed in Europe during medieval times and they became the trusted and faithful working dogs of the peasant farmer and herders. Early settlers to the New World brought cur dogs with them and they were developed to serve many functions.

Cur dogs are powerful and courageous fighters with a strong instinct to protect pioneer families and possessions. Their superb sense of smell allows them to track game with their head up and they have a good instinct to “tree” all game. These dogs provided meat for the table for pioneer families

and the pelts of animals treed by a cur dog often meant the difference in a family having new clothes, coffee, sugar, etc., or going without. The movie *Old Yeller* showcased the many attributes of the cur dog breed.

In general appearance cur dogs weigh 40 to 60 pounds and stand 17 to 24 inches high at the shoulders. They have a strong, muscular body with short hair. Colors range from black, yellow, and blond to tricolor to brindle and blue merle. Cur dogs have the strength and stamina to hunt large game such as bear and hogs, but their intelligence and strong treeing instincts make them excellent squirrel dogs.

Renewed Interest

Squirrel hunting with dogs began to lose popularity after the 1960s. As deer numbers begin to increase in the state many youngsters who begin hunting squirrels with dogs were drawn into deer hunting. Today there is a renewed interest in hunting squirrels with dogs as many of our older hunters long for the enjoyment of their youth—squirrel hunting with a good dog. In most cases the good dogs of those yesteryear hunts was a feist or cur.

Cur and feist dog breeds have been preserved, and many of the dogs in those breeds today are descendants of some of the best squirrel dogs that ever lived. Hunting squirrels with a dog from one of those breeds can be pure pleasure. ☐

Cur



21