

These Stone-Age Dogs Are Still Popular in Europe, but a Rarity in the US

The oldest breed of dog in Central Europe is almost unheard of in the US, and that's too bad. Appearing larger than they really are, these fluffy beauties are generally friendly with other dogs, cats, and humans, but make a terrific watch dog.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Having originated in Pomerania, now lying in parts of Germany and Poland, the German spitz is still popular in Germany, the U.K. and Australia but is somewhat rare in the U.S.
- One of the hallmarks of this breed is a thick double layer of fur, which “blows coat” or sheds twice a year, so it’s in need of a good brushing several times a week
- Often called a “lively” dog that trains easily and gets along well with other animals and humans, the German spitz is not necessarily so docile as to represent no challenges, so early training and close supervision when young is advised
- Given the right amount and appropriate levels of socialization, the German spitz can be equally affable with cats, other dogs and humans, but it's always a good idea to start socialization slowly and very early on
- If you're looking for a spirited canine companion with a penchant for play, this pup can appreciate the exercise and human interaction

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An area of the world once known as Pomerania is now known as a part of today's Germany and Poland, and that's where the intriguing German spitz originated. It's still a popular breed in this area of the world, as well as in Great Britain and Australia, but according to Vet Street, the German spitz is somewhat of a rarity in the U.S. As a breed, the German spitz comes in multiple colors, including white, cream, brown, gray, black, black and tan and orange.

They have a pointed, fox-like face, with wedge-shaped heads that may appear disproportionately small, and small, pointed "prick" ears. Their tails are bushy, typically called "flumed," and curls over their backs. In explaining how these dogs can be described, the Fédération Cynologique Internationale, or FCI, says these dogs are good watchdogs and companions. The spitz is the oldest breed of dog in Central Europe, with a lineage that can be traced back to the Stone Age. In behavior, FCI notes:

*"The German spitz is always attentive, lively and exceptionally devoted to his owner. He is very teachable and easy to train. His distrust to strangers and lack of hunting instinct make him the ideal watchdog for home and farm."*¹

Physical Aspects of the German Spitz Breed

The German spitz essentially has two layers of fur, called a double coat; one that's soft, short and wooly, and over it, a long, fibrous layer making up the topcoat. It's so thick around the neck and chest area that it can resemble a ruff. In fact, this double layer is one reason their hair stands out, making them appear larger than they really are. Such an abundance of fur translates to the need for a good brushing several times a week to get rid of loose hairs.

You might want to check for knots where their legs are connected to their bodies. There's an interesting term some may not be familiar with regarding shedding dogs: "blowing coat," which they do twice a year, requiring additional brushing. On a scale of one through five in the grooming category, the German spitz gets a four.

German Spitz Compared to Pomeranians

Often compared to the Pomeranian breed, the two do have a number of things in common. Part of the confusion may stem from the fact that the standard Pomeranian has another moniker: toy spitz. They are remarkably similar, but in showmanship circles, the differences are marked. Being essentially a European breed, FCI regulations for the German spitz call for a maximum height at the "withers," or the ridge between his shoulder blades, but it depends on whether she's a klein (small) or mittel (medium).

The former should be between 23 and 29 centimeters (cms) or 9 to 11 inches, while the latter is slightly larger at 30 to 38 cms, or 12 to 15 inches. In contrast, the Pom is around 30 cms tall and, overall, a smaller dog. Here's how the breed achieved its own sovereignty in the dog world, described by Pomeranian.com:

"During the late 1700s, the German spitz was imported into the U.K. in an attempt to resurrect colors lost to the breed in that country. Mrs. Averil Cawthera imported spitz wanting to reintroduce the white Pom (as opposed to the German spitz). Many imports came from Holland and they included Tum-Tum van het Vlinderhof of Lireva.

*The introduction of these dogs into the English Pomeranian world caused considerable angst amongst Pomeranian breeders and exhibitors until, in 1984, the kennel club intervened and set up a separate register for the German spitz."*²

Prior to the separate designation, some imported German spitz had been bred with Pomeranians, so many of today's Pomeranian champions have German spitz blood in their pedigrees. Interestingly, in years past, many of what were designated by their owners as the American Eskimo breed were actually German spitz imports from Germany.

Personality Plus — German Spitz

You won't run short of adjectives when describing this irrepressible dog. Those who own them offer words like "intelligent," "noisy," "adventurous" and "lively." The interpretation comes down to a need for close supervision and consistent training when they're young.

Less complimentary are terms like "evil," explained by the observation that left to their own devices, German spitz pups may become destructive in their intent on play and vocal in their need for engagement and interaction, but perhaps that can be said of most dogs; they need guidance and consistent boundaries.

Given the right amount and appropriate levels of socialization, the German spitz can be equally affable with cats, other dogs and humans, but it's always a good idea to start socialization slowly and very early on. Without proper training, this breed might view smaller animals, such as birds or pocket pets, as potential snacks and children as complete annoyances. Vet Street advises:

*"If possible, get him into puppy kindergarten class by the time he is 10 to 12 weeks old, and socialize, socialize, socialize. It's important for your puppy to meet as many people as possible during his first four months and to be exposed to different experiences to help prevent shyness."*³

Ideally, you should bring your pet to puppy play groups starting the day you bring the babe home, and puppy class (of course) followed up with obedience training and possibly a fun class, such as nose work or agility when the teenage months approach (6 to 11 months). Additional advice is to make training enjoyable, positive and worthwhile (from the dog's perspective), or this dog may simply refuse to participate.

You're not likely to find this dog napping on the porch for days on end. Like other dogs with a moderate energy level, a heart-thumping jog or rigorous 40-minute walk with 20 minutes of fetch at least once a day is recommended (read: required) to keep their spirits up and their ornery tendencies at a minimum.

German Spitz — Health and Life Expectation

You can expect to spend around 14 or 16 years with this pup, and she can sometimes live even longer with proactive care. While almost every dog can develop **genetic health problems**, especially with age, this one has more tendency toward idiopathic epilepsy, or seizures.

This may signal a brain disorder, but it's relatively rare, and may be evidenced by trembling or twitching throughout her entire body or just her face or legs. It may be isolated or brought on by another illness such as kidney failure or trauma and coincide with loss of bladder or bowel control.

Another genetic disorder you may find is retinal dysplasia, which can reduce a dog's ability to see. You might find that your dog is hesitant to jump down steps or venture into a dark hallway. It's usually an inherited, painless condition, according to Vetary.⁴ Progressive retinal atrophy is another eye disorder that can cause impaired night vision, diminished peripheral vision or complete blindness.

The German spitz may also be prone to luxating patellas, in which the dog's kneecaps slip out of place. It can be either congenital or developmental and make itself known when your dog starts limping. If treated in a timely manner, dogs with this condition may avoid arthritis or other problems later on.

If you're looking for a spirited canine companion with a penchant for play, this pup can appreciate the exercise and human interaction. If you can keep up with the shedding, early and adequate (and possibly ongoing) socialization and supervise their interactions at the park or with small children, the German spitz might be just what you're looking for. Check out local rescue organizations in your area if you're considering adding a German spitz to your home.

Sources and References

¹ [FCI January 25, 2013](#)

² [Pomeranian.org 1999-2017](#)

³ [Vet Street](#)

