

Just What IS A CGC And Why Should My Dog Get One?

CGC stands for Canine Good Citizen. The program started in 1989 and is designed to identify and reward dogs who have proven to have good manners, both in the home and in the community. All dogs, purebred or mixed breed, who pass the 10-step CGC test may receive a certificate from the American Kennel Club as the program stresses responsible pet ownership for owners and basic good manners for all dogs.

For those of you who have never taken an obedience class of any type, the Canine Good Citizen program is different from the traditional AKC obedience class. The CGC course was developed mainly for people who want to have obedient and socialized dogs but do not intend to do any serious competition. It is a program that teaches YOU how to train your dog and, in the process, the dog is socialized during the class. This is what the program goals were meant to be; how well this is accomplished depends on the expertise of the trainer. The obedience elements are the basic, "sit, stay, down, heel and come" commands, all necessary for a well-behaved dog. You are encouraged to praise your dog and continually communicate with it to help maintain its focus. It is ok to give treats. No military precision is necessary to complete and pass the course. Before you pay to attend a class, you should visit an in-process class to see that the dogs are being trained to your liking. Observe and ask questions.

CGC class is NOT the place for dogs with bad temperaments or for dogs with habits that need to be changed by professional dog trainers. It should be FUN for all participants, dogs and humans alike. On the last night of our recent course, one owner brought in pup cakes for all the dog students, and people-cupcakes for the handlers. As the young, pup cake baker said, "We always had a party on the last day when I went to school."

Why should you be interested in attending a CGC class? You may have owned dogs for years without the dogs ever getting or needing any formal training. Well, the times are changing. There are now real reasons to get your dog into a formal training class. A few of them are:

- Insurance companies now require that dogs of certain breeds have passed a CGC test before they will give you homeowners insurance. The list of breeds and insurance companies employing this restriction grows longer every year.
- Some major hospitals now allow dogs to visit patients while they are hospitalized. But most hospitals (I'm not talking about nursing homes) will forbid you to bring a dog into their facility if you don't have proof that your dog has passed a CGC test.
- Communities that have dog parks, and some state parks, are beginning to require that dogs entering their grounds have passed CGC tests. In some areas, a CGC tag is required by both city and county parks. With the many lawsuits filed over practically nothing, city and state governments feel safer knowing that dogs on their land are being handled by responsible dog owners.
- The CGC dog owners are a friendly group. Not only does the course give your dog a chance to interact with other dogs; it gives you a chance to meet new friends that have a common interest. Many owners have gone on to join dog clubs or to do volunteer work with their dogs.

- 39 state legislatures have passed resolutions endorsing the CGC program which clearly demonstrates that this program has found acceptance as the nationwide basic obedience program and a flag for responsible dog ownership.

The CGC class should bring you closer to your dog; the experience will teach you to work together and to have mutual respect for each other. Again, this course was designed for companion dogs, not show dogs, although many show dogs have finished the program to earn letters after their name and many of the CGC graduates have gone on to therapy work or later to compete in AKC Rally.

For more information on the CGC program, please visit the American Kennel Club website at www.akc.org.

Give your dog an opportunity to display a CGC certificate on your wall. You will be proud of what you have both achieved.
