

# DOG WORLD

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## Alaskan Klee Kai

By Alice Bixler

**History:** The Alaskan Klee Kai is the result of an accident becoming a new and beguiling breed. On second thought, make that two accidents and a couple of interesting coincidences thrown in for good measure.

It all began in the mid-1970s when Linda Spurlin of Wasilla, Alaska, traveled to Oklahoma with her husband to visit relatives who had a variety of farm dogs. She was immediately charmed by an adorable 17-lb, grey-and-white female husky and talked the relatives into letting her take the dog home. It seemed like people were drawn to the diminutive dog wherever they went. Spurlin realized what a treasure she had and wondered how to reproduce the little enchantress.

Now here's the first coincidence. Spurlin was unaware that her brother-in-law and his wife in Fairbanks, Alaska, had an unintentional mating of a small dog and an Alaskan Husky, and these were ancestors of Spurlin's dog. This couple also realized the potential of these northern delights and started a breeding program. Then, early in the 1980s, the brother-in-law discontinued breeding and sold all the dogs to Spurlin.

In time, a friend brought her mother to see Spurlin's brood. Her friend's mother took photos back to Colorado with her and finally persuaded her to sell a miniature husky to Eileen Gregory in 1987. Spurlin didn't think her breeding program had advanced enough to begin selling pups just yet, but many disagree. After Gregory's pup was introduced around, Spurlin was deluged with phone calls, correspondence, tourists and newspaper reporters who wanted to tell the world about these appealing pups that didn't have a name. What should they be called? Klee Kai, meaning "little dog" in Alaskan Athahaskan (the language of the Native Americans of Alaska), seemed to be a logical choice.

As kennel records became overwhelming, Gregory came to the rescue by offering to maintain them on her computer. In 1988, Spurlin formed the Alaskan Klee Kai Association of America (AKKAOA) as a domestic non-profit organization to "promote and improve knowledge of a newly developed breed." Her goal for the dog was simply to have them become beloved pets and companions for people who would appreciate their qualities. But she realized some owners might be interested in exhibiting them as well and contacted the AKC.

Although the AKC wasn't receptive at that point, the breed eventually achieved recognition by the American Rare Breed Association, Canine Rarities and the United Kennel Club which agreed to acknowledge only dogs whose pedigrees can be traced through the AKKAOA or the breed's other active club, the United Alaskan Klee Kai Association, because of the organization's strict rules on breeding privileges.

In January of 1995, Spurlin chose to stop breeding and turned her nine remaining dogs over to Gregory. Spurlin still monitors the breed's progress and services as advisor to the current board of directors, grateful to the folks who carry on her dream.

Let's take a look at the breeds that contributed to the Alaskan Klee Kai. Anyone familiar with sled-dog racing know about the Alaskan Husky, now considered one of the world's best racing dogs. The ancestors of the Alaskan Husky were Indian dogs employed by the inhabitants of interior Alaska. But they didn't get any respect until the last half century or so. When sled-dog racing became popular, it was that handsome Siberian Husky that ruled the trails. Later, in the late 1940's, mushers began to appreciate the heart and determination of the American-Indian dogs and cultivated them to become the swift Alaskan Husky of today. The Alaskan Husky is the basis for the Alaskan Klee Kai with a touch of Siberian Husky plus the Schipperke and American Eskimo Dog to reduce the size without introducing dwarfism.

**Appearance:** A member of the Spitz family on all counts, the Klee Kai resembles a husky in miniature and is bred in three sizes. The largest, Standard, measures from 15 to 17 inches at the withers and weighs approximately 23 lbs. The middle or Miniature variety ranges between 13 and 15 inches and tips the scales in the neighborhood of 15 lbs. The smallest, or Toy version may not be over 13 inches and must weigh under 10 lbs.

Rectangular in outline, the length of the back from withers to tail base is only slightly longer than the height at the withers. Like most northern breeds, the Klee Kai has a wedged-shaped head, prick ears and a double coat. The head is balanced with the length of the muzzle being equal to or slightly shorter than the somewhat rounded, broad skull and joined by a moderate stop. The lower jaw is strong with tight black lips except for red-coated dogs that may have liver-colored lips. The same exception applies to the nose in red-colored dogs, although a solid black nose is preferred in all others.

The teeth meet in a scissors bite. The obliquely set, almond-shaped eyes are medium in size and may be any color or combination of colors. The expressive triangular-shaped ears are well-furred and large in proportion to the size of the head. They're strongly erect with thick leather and rounded tips and set so that the inner edge of each ear is situated directly above the inner half of the eye below. The head is carried proudly atop and arched, medium-length neck. Moderately laid back shoulders and upper arms meet straight and parallel front legs which are fine to moderate in bone. Pasterns are short, flexible and gently sloping. The chest is moderately broad and descends to the elbows. The fore chest extends in a shallow oval shape in front of the forelegs. The topline displays withers just a bit higher than the croup. From behind the withers, the topline is level to the slightly arched loin. The broad croup slopes gently. The hind legs are moderately angulated at the stifle and hock joints. Rear pasterns are well let down and perpendicular to the ground. Oval paws are well knuckled up with thickly cushioned pads.

The well-furred tail is set on just below the level of the topline and should be carried in a loose curl over the back or on either side of the body.

The thick double coat consists of a soft, dense undercoat and straight outer coat. The hair forms a ruff around the neck which blends down into the apron. Although the coat is moderately long, its length never obscures the dog's outline. Feathering may appear on the rear of the front legs, the back of the hindquarters to the hock joint, the underside of the body, the tail, and ears. Except for trimming to neaten the feet, the breed is presented in a natural condition.

The coat may be any color, but the standard is quite precise regarding the facial mask, the most distinctive characteristic of the Klee Kai. Most desirable is a mask of dark color on the skull extending down the bridge of the muzzle and under the eyes. Add light spots over the eyes and a contrasting lighter color extending up the cheeks, down the sides of the muzzle, under the jaw and down the throat to complete the picture. The lighter the contrasting color on the upper part of the face, the less desirable the mask.

The Klee Kai should move with a smooth, effortless gait, exhibiting good reach and drive.

**Temperament:** One of the hallmarks of the breed is its curiosity. Expect the Klee Kai to check out just about anything that catches its eye. Coupled with his alert nature and loyalty to his owner, these traits make the Klee Kai an excellent watchdog. Although affectionate with those he knows and loves, he's likely to be reserved and cautious with strangers. The Klee Kai is small in stature but can be quite territorial. Active, quick and extremely agile, he makes an excellent companion that is always ready to play or head off for an adventure.

**Modern Function:** Spurlin's design for the breed was to create a compact companion dog, appealing in appearance, healthy, sturdy and smart. With its many sterling qualities, there's the likelihood of having a pet that could adapt and even excel in events such as obedience, agility and rally. Given the breed's heritage, the dogs may even pull wee sleds, but don't send in your entries for the Iditarod.

*Alice Bixler judges for the AKC, CKC, ARBA, Canine Rarities, and IABCA. She breeds and exhibits Bearded Collies and Lowchen and has been a professional dog writer since 1970s.*

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**CH 'PR' Doc Holliday's Wild West Jewel (Faro)**  
Courtesy of: Surf City Klee Kai Kennel



**GRCH 'PR' Alasco's Konesco (Kira)**  
Courtesy of: Cocal Alaskan Klee Kai

