

DOMESTIC VS. WILD

Though the dog is a direct descendant from the wolf, there are around 800 breeds of dog (*Canis lupus familiaris*), constituting a wide range of sizes, colorings, and mentalities. So what is the difference between wolves and dogs? Wolves and dogs are genetically 99% identical, but display a number of different behavioral and physical characteristics. The difference lies in the 12,000 years it took to domesticate the wolf into a dog, breeding out any wildness from what turned into man's best friend. It might be helpful to note that humans and chimpanzees are genetically 98% identical, yet we lead very different lifestyles with different motivations and instincts.

What does it mean to be domesticated? Dogs, horses and cows are domesticated, while coyotes, foxes and wolves are wild animals. Dogs were selectively bred to accommodate human's needs, and have evolved to become dependent on humans for thousands of years. What do you like the most about your dog? That he cuddles with you on the couch, or maybe that he can run at your heels for miles without chasing a squirrel, or that you can teach him all sorts of fun tricks like to play dead, roll over or fetch. This is the response most people have, and all of these characteristics of your pet dog are the result of domestication rather than canine instinct.

If you tried to cuddle with an adult wolf, it would probably growl to say "this is my nap time, leave me alone!" If you tried to teach a wolf to heel, as soon as another animal crosses its path, its predatory instinct would far overrule any sort of loyalty you were trying to instill. Wild animals are not suited to live with people. We cannot give them a happy and fulfilled life in captivity because they need the freedom to follow their independent instincts, those that have help them survive on their own for millennia.

What does it mean to be a wild animal? In the process of domestication, 12,000-15,000 years ago, an evolutionary split occurred between the wolves that were to become domestic dogs and the wolves that were to remain wild. The wolves that were unafraid of humans grew dependent on us for food, descending into the domestic dog. On the other side of the split, survival of the fittest was taking effect on the animals

that depended on their instincts to survive, resulting in very wild animals that depended on their fear of humans and wild instincts to survive. The animals with the strongest and most intelligent instincts survived, while the others were killed off by the elements or other predators. The theory of survival of the fittest explains how wolves with traits such as shyness have allowed them to survive by staying away from human settlements, where they might be shot for their fur.

Nearly all wild animals (such as deer, elk, bears, and mountain lions) have the instinct to be afraid of humans, even large predators. They have learned how to think for themselves, communicate and hunt with each other in very intricate ways - ways that are not conducive to living with people. Inviting a wolf into your home is similar to inviting a bear or deer to live with you. Would you expect either of those animals to understand or respect your furniture, personal belongings or time schedule?

