

What are Domestic Dogs (*Canis lupus familiaris*)

Which of the three wild canines do you think a Pomeranian came from? How about the Rotweiler? The Border Collie? The Poodle? The huge wolf, the middle sized coyote, or the little fox.

It turns out that all domestic dogs, from the Great Dane to the Chihuahua, are directly related to the wolf. But how did this happen? How did the dog end up becoming man's best friend, while the wolf remained wild and independent? How did a giant wolf become a tiny poodle?

The exact moment has been lost in time. The moment the first wolf braved its fear and stepped into the circle of light cast by man's fire. The moment the first man stared into the yellow eyes of the wolf, held out his hand, and shared his meal. In that now obscure moment, the history of man and wolf was forever changed. Since that moment when wolf first trusted man and man first trusted wolf, many things have changed, but there still remains a great respect between our species.

There are two theories that explain the events that led up to the domestication of the dog, though both agree that the magical event happened 12,000-15,000 years ago. It is generally agreed that wolves and humans have lived in close proximity to each other over the ages... each caring for their families and hunting for prey in similar fashions. One theory on domestication is that humans sought out, captured and adopted wolf pups to help with the hunt and offer protection. Over thousands of years, the captive wolves who were less aggressive and were good at begging for food adapted to life with humans and consequently had more pups. This slowly led to the creation of the dog... an extremely non-aggressive and puppy-ish wolf. The other theory is very similar, but with key differences. The second theory states that wild wolves were not caught and purposely domesticated by humans, but that certain wild wolves learned to live on the fringes of human communities, existing off of scrounged food scraps and waste. The generations of wolves born into this niche became more and more tame... the more human-friendly the animal, the more food it got, and the more pups it successfully produced. Either theory points right to wild wolves evolving through natural selection into today's domestic dogs.

Both theories, and even the idea that all dogs came from wolves has been highly contested over the years. However, recent genetic DNA test have shown that the gray wolf's DNA is 99% identical to all domestic dogs. While still distantly related, coyotes and foxes have very significant differences in their DNA from either the wolf or the dog. In fact, these DNA results have been so convincing and conclusive, that the domestic dog is now classified as a sub-species of the gray wolf. The Latin name of the gray wolf is *Canis lupus*, and the Latin name for the domestic dog is *Canis lupus familiaris*.

