



# A Winner in Every Season: *The Siberian Cat*

WRITTEN BY SAM SCHUNK  
VENICE GULF COAST LIVING MAGAZINE

Native to Siberia, the Siberian cat breed has endured the test of time. According to the Siberian Cat Club (SCC), the earliest recorded history of forest cats dates to the 13th century, with some experts speculating that the Siberian may even be the distant ancestor of all the long-haired breeds known today.

Over the centuries, these long-haired cats became domesticated, providing them with a warm refuge from the bitterly cold winters of their homeland. Owing to their wonderful temperament and their help in ridding the home of pests such as mice, people gladly welcomed these loving cats into their homes. In the early 19th century, Siberians put their first paw into European culture, where they appeared at cat shows on that continent. These fascinating felines didn't make their way to North America until about 30 years ago when the first of that breed was imported into the United States, and Siberians remain relatively rare in the country today.

These fabulous felines have amazing personalities, which long-time Siberian owner and psychologist Missy Trezciak-Kerr describes as, "the best parts of a cat and

a dog [put] together," which is why she has used her Siberians as therapy cats for years and highly recommends them as emotional support animals for many of her clients. She explains that they can be trained to 'give me a paw,' sit, roll over, fetch, release items, and walk on a leash or harness. As some dogs do, these cats can signal their desire to play by bringing you a toy or gift, a gesture that can also show their affection. But that's not all—breeder and owner Lyudmyla Shevchenko shares that some of her kittens have even been trained to skateboard! But they also have some endearing almost human-like traits such as sleeping on their backs or sitting upright like a person, and they love to snuggle up at night or for an afternoon nap with their favorite people. Siberian cats have water-repellant coats and enjoy water, so don't be surprised if your precocious pal pops in to check out the shower or sink! And no matter the weather—rain, cloudy



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PETS IN PARADISE

days, a sunny Florida afternoon, a winter cold snap, or a trip up north to frolic in the snow—they love to be outdoors, whether they are curling up to rest alone on the “catio” or joining you to explore the outside world. Lyudmyla says, “They love adventure such as a day at the beach or a car ride.”

Considered a medium-to-semi-large breed of cat, Siberians typically range from 10 to 12 inches in height and weigh between 12 to 20 lbs., although some exceed these dimensions. These cats mature very slowly, both physically and emotionally: it can take Siberians as long as five years to reach adulthood. While their average lifespan tends to be about 8 to 10 years, it’s not uncommon for them to live well beyond that under the right circumstances: Depending upon the care they receive and their genetic lines, Lyudmyla advises, these furry friends can live up to 20 years.



In terms of their personality, Siberians are generally mellow and quiet, but they can be more rambunctious during their kitten phase. When they do make noise, it will likely be a little purr or chirp to share their appreciation and affection for their favorite people. With their athletic ability and high intelligence level, it’s no surprise that they are energetic and adventurous problem solvers who love climbing, leaping, and exploring their environment. If you are a pet parent to a Siberian, you may find them in places like on top of your refrigerator or climbing to higher niches throughout your home. These inquisitive kitties also enjoy playing with puzzle toys and learning tricks.

remarkable attribute of a Siberian is their thick, three-layered coat that consists of coarse, straight guard hairs, thin, wavy awn hairs, and a woolly down undercoat. These thick coats run the full gamut of colors, with options including solid white, black, red, blue, and silver. They also come in a wide variety of patterns including smoke, point, calico, tabby, tortoiseshell, and bicolor. Siberian cats typically have golden, green, or copper eyes, although it’s not unusual for lighter-coated ones to have blue eyes. Not surprisingly, their long, weatherproof triple coats require brushing about three times per week to avoid matting, and they will also need their nails trimmed and their eyes and ears cleaned regularly. Twice a year, Siberian cats molt: In the spring, this breed sheds their longer, warmer winter coat, and in the fall, they shed a shorter summer coat.

*Continued on page 32*

From their tufted ears to pronounced neck ruff to the big, bushy tail that resembles a feather duster, the most



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Despite its shedding, Siberian cats are considered “hypoallergenic” because their skin produces less of the chemical associated with cat allergies (Fel-d1), according to the SCC. However, experts advise that there’s no such thing as a truly hypoallergenic pet. Jeff Nicholas, co-owner of Nicholas Siberians of Connecticut with his wife Yuliya, advises, “Hypoallergenic does not mean they are allergy-free. People with severe allergies, including me, can still have some reactions to these cats, but it will usually pass within a couple of weeks.” Since children who are raised with pets in their household are less likely to have allergies throughout their lifetime, a Siberian can be an excellent choice for about anyone; however, for potential owners with allergies, it is recommended to spend time with the breed first to see if or how these sensitivities may affect you before bringing home a Siberian cat.

If you take the leap, it’s important to know the basics of good cat care for these fantastic felines. To begin, keeping their bodies moving and minds engaged is essential, so be certain to leave out plenty of cat toys, provide them with a properly sized cat tree, and make time for lots of one-on-one play. When Siberians aren’t keeping themselves active by playing, they’re more than happy to crawl up into your lap and relax for a while. Since they are incredibly intelligent, it’s easy to train them to use a scratching post and litterbox, but please make sure that it’s big enough for them to comfortably do their business. Check in with your veterinarian to determine how much and how often to feed your Siberian. Also, it is recommended to feed your Siberians high-quality cat food and to monitor their food intake to help prevent overeating.



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Catch the Spring Members' Show until April 4 and plan to enter the "If Walls Could Talk" juried exhibition which will be on display from April 12 through 24.

Mark your calendar to enjoy the reception and award ceremony on April 12 from 5 to 7 p.m. Maria Galban and Pedro Quintero will exhibit their impressive art in the solo gallery at the same time. Do not forget classes, "Uncorked" evening sessions, and Baila Miller lectures. Enjoy springtime at the Venice Art Center and you will understand why our mission is "to provide cultural resources to the community and to enhance the knowledge and appreciation of all forms of visual arts."

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Powerful and highly intelligent, these gentle giants are big softies at heart that get along with people of all ages from infants to seniors, and pets including dogs, birds, and other cats, so socializing them tends to be easy as can be. In fact, while Siberians are more independent, they actually prefer to not be alone, so it's best to bring them into a household that may already have other animals or to bring home a comrade kitty or two so that they have a companion. That being said, however, these sensitive creatures are still extremely in tune with the people in their households, making them a great fit for individuals with health conditions since petting cats has been shown to reduce stress and blood pressure. In speaking of her cats, Missy says, "They're my babies. They sense when I'm sick and they stick close by me at those times."

Given their unmistakable charm and gorgeous appearance, Siberians have been featured in movies, commercials, and TV shows. In the 2016 movie "Nine Lives," the cat takes center stage since the plot revolves around a workaholic father whose mind gets stuck inside of his daughter's Siberian cat, Mr. Fuzzypants. Another notable example is the striking, regal cat who starred as the character "Church" in Stephen King's "Pet Sematary." In February, a Siberian, whose real name is Chipmunk, made a big splash in a Super Bowl commercial for Hellmann's Mayonnaise. Dubbed "Mayo Cat," the hilarious ad featured the cat saying a meow that sounded like the word 'mayo' when asked by "Saturday Night Live" alum Kate McKinnon what to do with her leftovers.

Whether they are on the small screen or you're lucky enough to be up close and personal with one of these fabulous felines, you will soon find that the Siberian is a sensational, sweet cat that is easy to love!

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