



Collars

By Karen Palmer

Buckle/ "Flat" Collars

The most common type of collar that is used for identification is the flat collar. These collars may have a metal buckle or a plastic snap, and can be found in flat, braided or rolled leather or in a variety of nylon colors. This type of collar is commonly worn most of the time, though they can be removed for kenneling; this can prevent parts of the collar or tags from catching on an enclosure and choking the dog. There are also flat collars available that have a safety clasp that is designed to break open under such circumstances.

To fit a flat collar properly, place two fingers underneath the collar when it is fastened on your dog. It should be snug but comfortable, and should not be able to slip off of the dog's head. This collar should not be used in early training, as it can put the most force against one area--the front of the throat, if the dog should pull or if the leash is pulled.

Greyhound/ Martingale Collars

For dogs that have a large neck, or a neck that is about the same circumference as the head, a greyhound collar may be more appropriate for daily wear (though not the best for training, for the same reason as the flat collar). This collar is most often made of leather or nylon, with chain, cord, or nylon shaped into a loop at the ends. A leash can be attached to a metal ring at the top of the outside loop. Most are designed to slide over a dog's head to put on, but to tighten when the dog pulls on a leash. The dog cannot easily escape by backing the head out from the collar when proper leash control is applied. This type of collar is commonly used by owners of greyhounds and bulldogs.

A Martingale collar should not cause discomfort when slipped over your dog's head. Fit it as you would a flat collar once it is on. When your dog pulls on leash, you will see a triangle shape form in the top loop of the collar. The bottom corners of this triangle should not meet in most circumstances. Many dogs have unique shapes, so always seek professional guidance if you are unsure of a proper fit for your particular dog's needs.



A Martingale/ greyhound collar in blue. Flat collars are also often made of nylon in various colors. They are not designed for use in training dogs, but are appropriate for holding identification on a daily basis.



Nylon slip collars in white and purple. The white one has a clasp which may help get a better fit.

Chain collars come with rings (left) and with a toggle (right). Toggle chain collars are sometimes easier to fit, especially with dogs with large heads and slim necks.

Chain/ Slip Training Collars

This type of collar is a common type of training tool that has been used and recommended by professional trainers for many years. It is made of chain links or nylon cord and is usually slipped over the dog's head to put on. Nylon slip collars and chain toggle collars may have a clasp or toggle that allows the handler to achieve a better fit.

The collar is designed to tighten at the dog's neck when the leash is pulled upwards. This should be a brief and slight motion, and not so severe as to choke the dog in order to guide or correct; it should only be used to get the dog's attention and communicate to him. However, too often the collar is misused and dogs are allowed to pull against the leash, causing discomfort and choking. A dog allowed to wear this collar without supervision may get it caught on something and may suffocate. It should only be worn during training; never leave this type of collar on a dog that is unsupervised.

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The links of a chain collar should be large enough, smooth enough and sturdy so that they do not put undue pressure on the dog's skin when pulled tight; fine, tiny, show-type slip leads are not meant to be used for training. When fitted properly, the collar will make an upside-down "P" shape. The ring the leash attaches to (the "running", or "live" ring) moves across the top of the neck and toward the dog's right side when in the heel position. When tightened gently, only about two to three inches of chain should remain outside of the snug loop around the neck. The collar should fit loosely when there is slack in the leash. We recommend the Herm Sprenger brand for its strength and quality, and recognize that it is used by many trusted professional trainers from around the world



The collar on top looks just a bit too large. Corrections will not be quite as effective as they should be due to the extra length. The one on the bottom is okay, but appears to be just a bit too small. The desired slack, measured with gentle tension applied as seen here, should be about 2 inches.

Pinch/ Prong Collars

Pinch collars have strong metal or plastic links with inward-facing prongs and a chain or cord loop placed at the back of the neck. The loop is designed much like that of the Martingale collar— it pulls the ends of the collar toward each other. The collar is designed to gently squeeze the dog's neck, especially at the scruff, with steady pressure when either the dog pulls away from the leash or when the handler pulls at the leash to make a correction. It requires a subtle touch, and can be effective with many dogs that have a habit of pulling on leash. The chain collar and prong collar can be safer than other collar types as training tools because the stress of a corrective action is distributed more evenly, and not just on the front of the throat. The pinch/ prong collar is not recommended for aggressive dogs.

When fitted properly, the collar will be snug directly behind the dog's ears, and will not fall far down his neck. The chain or cord loop will spread across the distance between the ends of the links. Should a dog pull away from the leash, the loop should form a slight triangular shape, but the ends should not be so close as to touch each other. In many cases, the collar will be very effective instantly, and the dog will cease pulling. This can be an effective tool for managing large or strong dogs to walk loosely on a leash. This collar should never be worn without supervision.



Here's another look at the "triangle" shape in the prong/pinch collar. Remember, a prong collar is NEVER put on by sliding over the dog's head!



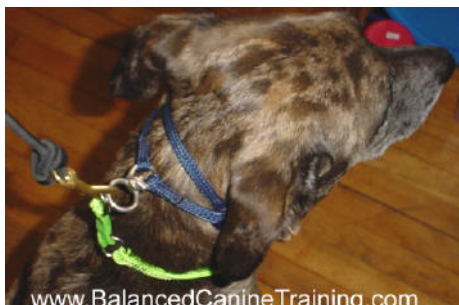
Three pinch or prong collars of different sizes. Note the one on the top has a quick release. The one at the left is opened. Note the "triangle" shape in the chain links of the collar at the top. This collar would be fitted too loosely on a dog if this shape forms when a correction is not being made.



A newer model of this collar, the Triple Crown Collar/ Good Dog Collar, is available in some pet stores. This collar is made of plastic and cord, and is easier for some people to fit properly, as the links on metal collars must be squeezed to put on and off the dog (NEVER SLIDE A PRONG COLLAR OVER THE DOG'S HEAD!). These plastic links snap together and are flat on the outside, which makes it resemble a flat collar to the casual observer. Many owners prefer to avoid a negative stigma this way.

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Here's a nice, snug fit with a "Good Dog Collar" from Triple Crown on the left, with an additional nylon slip collar as an emergency back-up. Should the prong links come apart during training, the leash is still safely attached to the dog. The slip collar should be oversized just a bit, so the pinch collar does its job without interference. On the right is a regular prong collar.



Purchase a high quality prong collar, such as a Herm Sprenger model. Avoid inexpensive models, which are more likely to bend or break loose during training. To avoid losing control of a dog with any pinch collar, always use a nylon or chain slip collar fitted a bit too large and also attached to your leash as a backup. If the pinch collar links breaks loose, the slip collar will remain on the dog, and your leash will still allow you to have control.

Head Halters

Head halters work with the same premise as horse halters— that large animals can be more easily controlled via head and muzzle control than via neck and collar control. Some dogs can be prevented from exhibiting behavior problems when wearing a properly fitted head halter as a management tool.

There are a number of companies that provide head halters of various designs. The Halti and the Gentle Leader are the most common. Leash pressure works with the collar to close a dog's mouth and turn his head toward the owner if he attempts to pull away with the Halti. The Gentle Leader fits differently, requiring a very snug fit to work properly.

Here's Rocky modeling a head halter called a Halti, size 3. Note the extra piece from the halter to the flat collar, which acts as an additional 'safety net' to the leash. As with any other dog training tool, handlers must be responsible for the proper fit and use of head halters. These may cause serious injury if not handled properly.



One of these Halters may fit some breeds better than others, but there are always exceptions. Please seek professional guidance to decide which halter may work best for your dog, and then follow all instructions to fit it properly and teach your dog to accept it at a pace that is best for him. Some dogs will adjust to a head halter right away, while others are more reluctant and may need further encouragement and patience from the owner. As with any tool, head halters work very well for some dogs, but not as well for others.

The head halter can also cause problems if not fitted or used properly. Avoid causing cervical damage by monitoring the force used, or avoid this tool altogether. It is often more successful as a management tool than as a teaching or training tool. Karen avoids using them due to the risk of subluxation injuries to the neck, and the lack of effectiveness.

Remote Training Collar/ Electronic Collar

Electronic collars were originally used to encourage a fast recall in hunting dogs as they strayed while off-lead. They now have many settings and are safer and easier to use. Many professional trainers use these collars almost exclusively in their training programs, and some use electronic bark collars to help with excessive barking issues.

Many collars have settings so low that the dog feels only a slight tingling sensation, and sometimes the owners can't even feel it! They also have vibration and/ or sounds that can be used to either warn a dog that stimulation may follow as a correction, or to reward a dog for desirable behavior. They are effective and reliable tools when used properly.



This is Bindy, modeling a remote training collar from Tri-Tronics. This collar must be fitted very snugly, according to the manufacturer's directions. As with ANY collar or other training tool, handlers should seek professional guidance for the correct and safe fit and use of this collar.