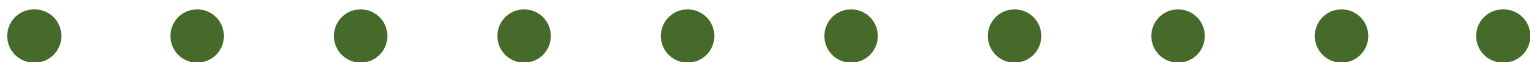




Doggies' Day Out

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At 5:30 p.m., the gray, stone walls of Seger Dog Run in Center City Philadelphia have turned into arena seating for fashionably dressed dog owners sipping their Starbucks lattes. Random chatter fills the park, with an occasional, whiney, “Oh, my God!” prevailing from a small clique of young business women sitting upright along the stone wall.

Meanwhile, in the center of the park, a pack of assorted dogs runs left, then right, then left again, pausing at the newly planted tree to see if it needs another sprinkle or two. A small, overexcited Boston terrier has his heart set on an older, larger shepherd mix, who is just not at all interested in having a rendezvous today.

Fed up with the other dogs, a French bulldog runs over the damp wood chips to his owner with a wet, brown tennis ball shoved far into his mouth. Cautiously grabbing the ball with two fingers, one of the well-dressed women lightly tosses the ball, and then quickly resumes her oh-so-important conversation.

Philadelphia is not only a City of Brotherly Love, but also a city for canine cavorting. Dog parks throughout Philadelphia offer many different things, depending upon what you are looking for. Settings, people, types of parks, rules, regulations, and membership fees can influence your personal experience, and your dog’s experience, at the parks.



Photo by Tamar Rios

Clark Park

Clark Park is located in the University City section of Philadelphia. The park is publicly owned, and it does not have an enclosed dog run. However, Clark Park has a large, grassy area for dogs to play in. While the park lies within a six-block radius, an area of the park at 45th Street and Chester Avenue is a great place for dogs. It is free, open to the public, and does not have any set hours.

In the “dog” section of Clark Park, a deep, oval-shaped area is a gathering spot for the dogs of University City. While Philadelphia law requires dogs to be on a leash at all times, the dogs at Clark Park roam free within the bowl area. The dog section is very clean, with

enough trees to provide shade in the hot summer months.

The dog area often draws a small crowd of people, who are friendly toward newcomers to Clark Park. Many of the people and dogs are residents of the area, and they enjoy getting dirty with their dogs. Dogs also join their owners in other Clark Park festivities such as Farmers’ Market and live music shows.

Before venturing to Clark Park, you may need to pack a few things for your dog. Since the park is not a designated dog run, you will need to bring plenty of poop bags. Also, the dog area is large, so bring a tennis ball or Frisbee to play with your pooch. If you don’t have a toy, the other owners don’t mind sharing. And always bring a bottle of water for your canine friend, too.

It is important that if your dog does not listen well, or if your dog is too aggressive, you may want to go to a park that is fenced-in.

Schuylkill River Dog Run

Schuylkill River Dog Run is located on 25th Street, between Pine and Locust streets. The park is operated by the Friends of Schuylkill River Park Dog Owners’ Association, which sets park rules. While dog owners using the park are supposed to be members of the association, the park is not monitored for membership cards. Other rules include requiring a Department of Health tag issued by the city of Philadelphia, which again is not enforced.

Once you get past reading a long list of rules posted on the double park gates, the actual run is accommodating to all sizes of dogs. The dog run is separated into two sections: one for small dogs (where no large dogs are allowed) and one for all dogs. Both sections include a few benches for dog owners, water fountains for dogs and humans, bag dispensers, and toys.

Schuylkill River Dog Run, which is open 24 hours, is coated with stones and gravel. When the park is crowded, the gravel creates a good amount of dust, which can be bothersome to dogs and their owners. Also, the main dog section does not have many trees covering the park. In the summer months, dogs usually sit behind the limited numbers of benches, trying to lie in the shade.

But do not fret. The dog run is located within a larger public park. There are more benches, trees, and plenty of grass. And there’s not a lot of motor vehicle traffic, which is safer in case your pooch wants to wander around.

Seger Dog Run

Seger Dog Run is located on Rodman Street (between 10th and 11th streets, and South and Lombard streets). The park is op-

erated by the Seger Park Dog Owners' Association. Membership in Seger is optional, and there is no fee for using the dog run. Seger does ask that all dogs using the park are vaccinated. You can also bring your dog into the park if he or she is not spayed or neutered. However, all dog parks in Philadelphia highly recommend that you do not bring a dog in heat into the park.

Seger Dog Run is a dog owner's dream. The park has trees, benches, a water fountain, lights, a fire hydrant, poop bags and trash cans. And since the tennis courts are next to the dog run, there are lots of tennis balls to play with! Also, there is a stone path through the park for owners to walk along and wood chips for the dogs to run around on. The park is renovated every six to eight months for cleaning and new flooring.

The park is open every day from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Seger is very crowded during the morning hours and in the evening from 5 to 7:30 p.m. on weekdays. If your dog is anti-social, the park is less crowded during the afternoon and somewhat empty after 8 p.m. If you do plan on going when the park is crowded, bring a friend with you other than your dog. The park tends to get very cliquey. You won't need a friend if you go later in the evening; the loner bunch will talk to you.

Since Seger is located in Center City, it is important to leash your dog when exiting the park. The streets surrounding the park are busy with traffic.

Mario Lanza Dog Park

Mario Lanza Dog Park is located on Queen Street, between Second and Third streets in the Queen's Village section of the city. The park is an enclosed dog run, open 24 hours. While Mario

Lanza follows basic rules of cleaning up after your dog and no aggressive dog behavior, another rule that is enforced by the community is that only spayed or neutered dogs can use the dog park. Also, even though the park is enclosed, you should keep a watchful eye on your dog. The park has two single-gated entrances at both ends of the park, which make it easy for dogs to sneak out when others are getting ready to head home.

Mario Lanza is relatively small for a dog run, but large dogs will still get plenty of exercise. The park is simply a long, narrow, open area covered with wood chips. Seating is limited; there is one picnic table and two park benches. The park also doesn't have any sharable toys, so you might want to bring your own. The rest of the park is open, with one tree planted inside the dog run. While the park does not have a water fountain, Mario Lanza does have a water bowl that can be filled with conveniently located hoses. The hoses are helpful if you want to clean your pooch before going home.

Mario Lanza attracts friendly dog owners from the Queen's Village area. Most of the dogs and owners at the park live in the vicinity of the park. However, if you are new to the area, or just want to stop by the park, the people will be welcoming to you and your dog. Like most dog parks, Mario Lanza also has a busy, after-work crowd that tends to run from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Since the park is smaller than most dog runs,



Photo by Tamar Rios

a small group of people can fill up the park quickly. If you intend to give your dog a workout, the afternoon hours would better suit your needs.

Marconi Plaza—West

Marconi Plaza is a public park that expands from 13th to 15th streets, from Oregon Avenue to Bigler Street. Unless you are from South Philly, you would probably overlook that there is a gathering spot for dogs. While the park is public, and there is not a fenced-in dog run, many residents of the area take their dogs to play in one corner of the park. Near the corner of the park at 15th and Bigler streets, dogs of South Philly congregate to play with one another.

Since Marconi Plaza is not an of-

ficial dog run, there are several things to take into consideration. You will have to supply your own bags, water and toys for your dog. While the park does have trash cans, Marconi Plaza has trash scattered around the grass. For the most part, the area used by dogs stays cleaner than the rest of the park. But before letting your dog off the leash, make sure the surrounding area is free of glass and food.

The best time to visit Marconi Plaza is during the week right after work. Since the park is community-oriented, there are not many visitors from outside the area. Also, the early evening hours are typically the only time there is a group of dogs at the park. The park is desolate during the morning and late evening hours.

While many of the people meeting at Marconi Plaza know one another from the neighborhood, the dog owners tend to be friendly to people just passing by. Don't forget: If your dog tends to wander while off its leash, Marconi Plaza is not the place for you. Two extremely busy streets border the far side of the park.

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