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Dog runs, New York  
*Paws for thought*

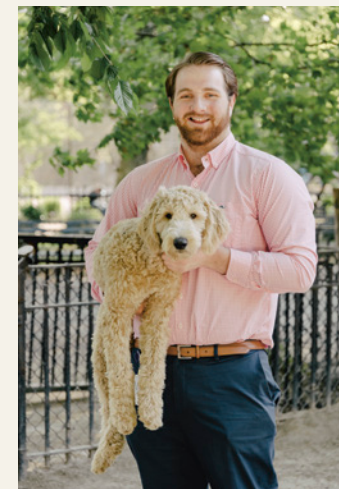
Having a dog trot by your side does wonders to combat a city-induced sense of loneliness – and not just because pooches are faithful companions. Dog-owners are a peculiar tribe who inhabit almost-empty parks before sunrise. They congregate daily in dog runs and often end up making friends too.

Many of the 140 public off-lead areas in New York have become busier morning meet-up places than some neighbourhood cafés. In the heart of Manhattan’s East Village, the Tompkins Square Dog Run is the oldest in New York. Opened in 1990 in place of a run-down square, the park has always been funded and managed by volunteers. Tompkins’s granite sand, ample runs, bone-shaped paddle pools, fresh-water hoses and picnic areas still make this the city’s best canine oasis.

While most other New Yorkers are getting ready for their daily commute in a jam-packed subway, here residents of all stripes can get together and enjoy an early-morning natter. Some (having just rolled out of bed) keep to themselves. Yet no matter the hour, dogs are consistently enthusiastic; this is their chance to roam free in their own little piece of Manhattan.



**Runners-up:**  
Other New York doggy favourites include Washington Square Dog Run in Greenwich Village – with its circular benches for both humans and their four-legged friends – and Battery Park City’s Sirius Dog Run, known for its refreshing pool



**Urban canine companions**  
*Five furry urban friends*

1. **Wire fox terrier:** The wire fox terrier is gentle and sociable with both people and pooches so trips to the park may well end in making new friends. Its small stature and laid-back attitude mean it’s also content to relax with you indoors. But this is not a dog to be neglected; it needs a good brush every now and then and regular trips to the salon, please.



2. **Whippet:** A little smaller than a greyhound but equally slim and fast (and we mean *really* fast), the whippet is a graceful, well-tempered companion. Highly strung and muscular, it’s not the breed for couch potatoes: while it may have a placid disposition when inside, the whippet loves a good sprint around a park and won’t be happy unless it has regular outings. Its silky, short coat means little maintenance is required (so no expensive grooming bills).

3. **Cavalier King Charles spaniel:** If you’re not sold on the regal name alone, this breed’s loving and loyal demeanour will win you over. Its favourite occupation is to spend time with its owner. What more could you want after a hard week? Unlike other very sociable breeds such as the golden retriever, the King Charles is petite and doesn’t need a half-marathon every morning to be happy; it’s usually content with a modest stroll. Forget to comb its luscious hair, though, and you’ll have one grumpy pooch on your hands.



4. **Bichon frise:** If this nipper looks like it’s just walked out of the salon, that’s because it probably has. The bichon frise is the chic madame of the canine world. It can be a fussy eater (with a proclivity for podginess) and needs regular, often professional, grooming. But among the breed’s many virtues are a playful, verging on comic, disposition and a compact stature perfect for apartment-dwellers. Exercise is a must, of course, but a 30-minute walk each day is sufficient. And did we mention how adorable it is?

5. **Basenji:** This African breed is the ideal city dog. Slim, graceful and independent (you might come home to find it playing poker with pals), the basenji is as fastidiously clean as a cat. It enjoys stretching its legs (but not as much as a boxer), and its short, suede-like coat is easier to care for than that of a terrier. Taciturn households, rejoice: the basenji doesn’t bark, instead emitting melodious little chortles. That should keep the neighbours’ noise complaints at bay.

