Congratulations
on your new
Australian Shepherd!



Breed Characteristics

Australian Shepherds—*affectionately called "Aussies"*—were developed to herd livestock and work as all-purpose farm and ranch dogs. While many Aussies continue to work as herding dogs, the breed has earned recognition in a variety of other roles because of their high intelligence, trainability and eagerness to please. Australian Shepherds also work as Search and Rescue dogs, guide dogs for the blind, therapy and hearing ear dogs, and drug detection dogs. They have become highly regarded for their skills in the competitive sports of obedience, agility and flyball. And, most of all, they are beloved family companions.

Temperament

Aussies are "people" dogs that thrive on human companionship. They have an intense need to be near their owners, following them from room to room when indoors and staying close by their heels when outdoors. Because of this trait, your Aussie will be happiest when kept in the house as a member of your family. Dogs kept in kennels or fenced yards need a significant amount of "people" time each day in order to remain emotionally healthy. Isolation from humans can quickly ruin an Aussie's personality.

Australian Shepherds that have been properly socialized and trained are ideal family dogs. They are gentle guardians of small children and enthusiastic playmates of older children and adults. However, Aussies are typically reserved with strangers and can be quite protective of their family and property. Taking your dog to training classes and introducing him to a wide variety of people and places will help him develop appropriate social behaviors.

Care

Most Aussies are energetic dogs that require vigorous daily exercise to keep them healthy and happy. Running, playing with another dog, retrieving a ball or Frisbee, swimming or participating in other activities are some ways your dog can get the exercise he needs. If exercise is not provided on a daily basis, your dog may bark or become destructive out of frustration.

As a pet owner, your responsibility includes ensuring that your dog has a securely fenced area in which to exercise, or leashing him when exercising in public places. When your Aussie is not being supervised, he should be confined to your home or a fenced area. Your dog should never be allowed to run free or roam as he could be injured or killed. You should never keep a dog tied or chained because of the high risk of injury.

Grooming

A healthy Australian Shepherd coat sheds dirt and does not require a great deal of maintenance. Weekly brushing down to the skin with a pin brush will eliminate mats and tangles and remove dander and dust. A slicker brush will help remove undercoat during the shedding season. Weekly toenail trimming and teeth cleaning should also be part of your dog's grooming routine.

Veterinary Care

A puppy requires parasite control and a series of vaccinations to prevent life-threatening diseases. An adult Aussie requires an annual veterinarian check-up, vaccinations, parasite check, heartworm test and heartworm preventative (in many parts of the country). Follow your veterinarian's health care recommendations.

Training and Activities

Basic obedience training is an essential part of responsible dog ownership. It will make your dog a better companion and will help establish a stronger bond between the two of you. Because your Australian Shepherd wants to please you and is eager to learn, training can be a very enjoyable experience. Positive training methods using lots of praise and/or treats will work well for most Aussies. Harsh corrections are seldom necessary for this breed.

Most communities offer dog training classes. Check your local Yellow Pages under "Pet Training" or ask your dog-owning friends for recommendations on where to train. Classes often begin with puppy kindergarten and continue with basic adult obedience. Advanced level training classes

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are available to people who wish to prepare their dog for competition at dog shows. Agility and Flyball are popular activities that are well-suited to energetic dogs and their owners.

Herding

Aussies are born with varying amounts of herding instinct and ability. If you are interested in developing your dog's herding talents, you will need to let him work livestock on a regular basis. If you own sheep or cattle, your Aussie will quickly learn to help with chores and can be a tremendous asset in handling the stock.

Whether you live in the country or city, herding clinics and instruction by herding trainers can help you and your dog learn the techniques of herding livestock. Herding trials provide opportunities to test your teamwork and skills.



Spaying and Neutering

Spaying or neutering your Aussie has positive benefits for you and your pet. Spayed females often live longer and have fewer health problems than unspayed females. Spaying eliminates uterine cancer and greatly reduces the risk of mammary cancer. You will also be spared the inconvenience and mess of twice-yearly heat cycles.

Neutered males will be less inclined to wander and are usually more tolerant of other male dogs. Neutered males cannot develop testicular cancer and have a lower risk of developing prostate cancer.

One of the greatest benefits of spaying and neutering is that you will not be adding to pet population issues. Hundreds of thousands of dogs are euthanized each year because irresponsible owners are not willing to provide care, training and love. Spaying or neutering your pet dog means these abandoned puppies will have a better chance of finding loving homes.

Breeding

Breeding dogs is a great responsibility. You must understand pedigrees and genetics in order to avoid the genetic defects in the breed and to produce quality animals. You must have the financial ability to provide a large litter of pups and their mother with high quality food and veterinary care, and be able to afford medical clearances of eyes and hips, stud fees, shipping expenses, advertising costs and medical emergencies. You must have the time and energy to sanitize the puppies' quarters and to properly socialize the pups so they reach their full potential. Equally important is the essential process of finding and educating responsible new families for the puppies, to ensure these pups live long and happy lives.

Should you decide to breed your Aussie, you will first need to verify that he/she is free of serious genetic problems. These can include hip dysplasia (a crippling malformation of the hip joints), inherited eye defects which can cause blindness, epilepsy, skin allergies and bleeding disorders. Poor temperament is also a serious problem passed from parent to puppy. Before you breed your Aussie, remember that no dog with genetic problems should be bred. Your veterinarian can perform some of the necessary tests and can recommend specialists who will be able to screen for other problems.

The United States Australian Shepherd Association (USASA)

USASA is dedicated to the well-being of this breed. For more information about becoming a club member contact:

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Resources for more information

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