

BREED PROFILE: GERMAN SHEPHERD



TULARE COUNTY
ANIMAL SERVICES

The German Shepherd is one of America's most popular dog breeds—for good reason. They are active and affectionate dogs, famous for their loyalty, confidence, courage, high intelligence, and willingness to put their lives on the line to defend loved ones.

German Shepherds are gentle and easy-going companions and great for any active individual or family. They make wonderful house dogs, as they enjoy spending time with their people and will do their part to protect the home.

TRAINING & SOCIALIZATION

Training and socializing are a must. German Shepherds may sometimes become anxious or even aggressive if not properly trained and handled. The good news is that they are highly intelligent and very easy to train. They're amazingly versatile, excelling at most anything they're trained to do. Give German Shepherds good structure, leadership, and direction in their lives, or they will make their own rules. Obedience training is important to teach them basic canine manners.

Proper socialization is necessary to make sure German Shepherds do not become stressed or scared when meeting new people or animals and seeing new environments. They can be aloof and suspicious around new people. Lack of proper socialization and training can lead to dangerous trouble. To raise social and well-behaved dogs, expose them to many experiences, places, sounds, smells, and people. One of the main keys to successful living with a German Shepherd is ongoing, positive training and socialization.

A German Shepherd can be the best dog you will ever have. However, there are issues to consider before adding one to your household.



HAVE YOU HERD?

German Shepherds make great ranch dogs, as well. Originally bred to herd, German Shepherds love to herd animals such as livestock and will also protect the livestock from predators. They can follow you around while you tend to the daily responsibilities. However, some German Shepherds may not be good with small animals or children and can have livestock issues due to their herding instincts.

HEALTH ISSUES

In general, German Shepherds are healthy. However, there are some health problems common for this breed:

- **Hip and elbow dysplasia** tops the list of health concerns for this breed. These are developmental abnormalities in a dog's joints, causing pain, lameness, and the development of arthritis.
- **Gastric dilatation-volvulus** (bloat), a sudden and life-threatening swelling of the abdomen in which the stomach becomes overstretched and rotated by excessive gas content.
- **Degenerative myelopathy** is an incurable, progressive disease of the canine spinal cord that is similar in many ways to ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease).

A HAIRY SITUATION

The German Shepherd's iconic look is impressive, but you'll have to be willing to put in the time for routine grooming. They have coarse hair with thick undercoats, and they shed a lot. Their nickname is the "German shedder." Be prepared for hair everywhere! Their coats should be brushed every few days, and you'll need to vacuum frequently. Luckily, the coat also resists dirt and debris, and you won't need to bathe your dog more than once a month.

ROOM TO ROAM

They've got a reputation for being a great watchdog—and they are—but the German Shepherd should never be chained or tethered just to stand guard. No dog should; it leads to frustration and aggression.

German Shepherds are happiest living indoors with the family but with access to a large, fenced yard, where they can run and play and burn off some of their natural energy. Although they can do all right in apartment settings, they need regular walks to avoid becoming bored and to release energy.

CHILDREN & OTHER PETS

German Shepherds make great companions for children. In fact, some say they're a cross between a babysitter and a cop, both gentle with and protective of the children in their family. These dogs love being around children, making them excellent playmates. They are large and very sturdy, so they can handle all the pats, hair pulling, and love that children will give to their best friend. This is a big dog, though, and it can easily bump and knock over a toddler or small child by accident. Plus, their size and bark can be very intimidating and scare some children.

The dog's temperament, socialization, and training all need to be considered. Like children, each dog is different in personality, energy, and patience levels, so each dog and child relationship should be considered individually.

German Shepherds can also live peacefully with other dogs and pets, as long as they have been socialized and trained properly.

The German Shepherd can be the dog and friend of a lifetime in the hands of a loving, committed, involved owner.

EXERCISE, STIMULATION & COMPANIONSHIP

German Shepherds are active, energetic, athletic, and intelligent dogs. They must be kept busy learning, playing, and working. German Shepherds need a job to do—otherwise they can be disruptive or destructive. Daily exercise and mental stimulation will provide the best quality of life.

It's even more important that your dog is given plenty of attention and not left alone most of the day. A German Shepherd is extremely bonded to and craves involvement with his people. They are happiest when living in the household and included in daily activities. This is not a breed that can be ignored or left alone for long periods of time, since they are susceptible to separation anxiety.

Without the companionship they need—as well as exercise and the chance to put their intelligence to work—they become lonely, bored, and frustrated. That can lead to behaviors such as barking, digging, and chewing. If you are thinking of getting a German Shepherd and leaving it in the yard with limited family contact, then both you and the dog will be miserable!