

Should I Get an Australian Shepherd: Your Personality Guide to an Extra Special Breed.

Meta Description: *A heartfelt look at whether an Australian Shepherd is the right dog to adopt, centered on the breed's personality traits and told by a devoted owner preparing to say goodbye to her beloved Golden Retriever.*

My old girl, a Golden Retriever mix, is sadly starting to show her age. She's always been a peppy and somewhat spastic dog, but since hitting that 9-year mark, her gears have begun to slow and rust. She just doesn't go like she used to. To me, she was the most perfect dog ever, and I don't know how I'll ever replace her once she's gone.

Now that she's getting up there in age, it's time to bring a new puppy into the house — one who will look up to my Goldie and, hopefully, pick up all her habits and wisdom.

I'm looking for a dog who's loyal, smart, trainable, and good-tempered. I want a pup that will cuddle and play, but knows when it's time to get serious and listen. And let's be honest - it wouldn't hurt if she were beautiful.

After a long (and sometimes obsessive) search, I've fallen in love with the idea of an Australian Shepherd. This breed seems to have everything I'm looking for... and then some.

But it's the "and then some" that gives me pause.

Because during my search for a worthy successor to my beloved Golden Retriever, I've come to realize something important: not every dog is for every person.

So the real question is: **Is an Australian Shepherd worth it?**

The Australian Shepherd – An All American Dog

In the late 1800s, deep in the American West, a new dog breed was developed - one designed to help pioneers prosper in their ambitions. These dogs were bred to be as tireless and fearless as their owners, working alongside them in the harsh conditions of the frontier.

The Australian Shepherd was originally bred to herd livestock, a job they still perform to this day. I first met an Australian Shepherd on my uncle's farm, where she was used to herd wool sheep and guinea hens. Her name was Daisy, and I was struck by the undeniable charm and genius to the way she moved through and around the herd, guiding them with a firm but gentle paw.

This origin as a work dog has a strong influence on the modern Aussie's personality. These dogs are highly intelligent, able to memorize commands with only 25–40 repetitions (compared to the typical 70–100 repetitions for most breeds). They can even obey commands perfectly on the first or second try up to 50% of the time, which is no small feat for our four-legged friends.

Their impressive smarts, combined with their strong work ethic, means they'll always be looking for something to do.

So, how does this play out in everyday life? Well, if you don't give them a job to do, chances are they'll find one themselves. While we must appreciate this entrepreneurial spirit, it can be a nuisance at times, as boredom can

lead to disruptive or destructive behaviors like herding your children about the house, chewing the tassels off your throw pillows, or puzzling a way to get over (or under) the backyard fence.

With their big brains and high energy, Australian Shepherds **must** be mentally stimulated, every day. In fact, keeping their minds busy is way more important than exercising their bodies - these dogs were built to solve problems. They like complicated tasks and get a kick out of figuring things out, like how to escape the backyard or how to get food out of the cupboards. If you fail to keep your pup interested and engaged, you could end up with a destructive and nervous dog who **will** find something to do with all that unused energy.

Here's a list of various "jobs" designed to keep 'em busy:

- Mastering agility courses
- Puppy puzzles like Buster Cubes or a Kong Wobbler
- Daily training regimen (beyond the standard sit, stay, etc.)
- Teach them fun tricks, like how to fetch you a soda from the fridge
- Fetch. So. Much. Fetch.

Loyalty

Along with intelligence, Australian Shepherds are passionately eager to please. These two traits make them highly trainable companions — not only do they pick up on commands quickly, but they're deeply motivated by the desire to make you happy. Basically, anything you take the time to teach, they'll work hard to learn.

But their trainability is only part of the story - what really sets them apart is their fierce, almost obsessive loyalty.

To understand why, you have to look back to their roots: Back in the Wild Wild West, Australian Shepherds were bred and trained to work closely with ranchers to guard and manage livestock. They needed to be able to understand complex commands and reliably return when called, ready and waiting for the next order. The more attuned the dog was to their master's commands and intentions, the more effective they were at their job.

This is where loyalty becomes crucial. Intelligence can lead to independence - even stubbornness - but when paired with fierce loyalty, it creates a dog that *wants* to return to its master's side, no matter how far they roam.

Aussies also come with a strong pack instinct, similar to other herding breeds. In order to herd other animals, they needed to be able to keep tabs on the creatures and anticipate how they would move. This too lends itself to a clingy animal, as they often transpose these behaviors over to their humans when there are no sheep around to herd.

Remember the warning about the Shepherd potentially herding your kids? Yeah, this is why they do stuff like that.

At the end of the day, an Aussie's loyalty isn't just emotional - it's a sense of *duty*. It's not just that they love you, but they've assigned themselves the job of protecting, guiding, and staying close. And it is a job they take very seriously.

...Maybe a Bit TOO Loyal

This unwavering devotion and undying loyalty ain't all grand, however.

Step out of your shepherd's shadow for too long, and you may find yourself on the wrong end of a very anxious dog.

Picture this: You've come home after a late night at work, only to find the corners of the couch gnawed to bits, pillow fluff strewn across the floor like a scene of carnage, and a few "presents" thoughtfully left on the rug. Your otherwise perfectly behaved pooch has descended into chaos and destruction, your home the collateral damage.

That's separation anxiety, and for Australian Shepherds, it's a pretty big deal. Recall that these dogs were bred to work closely alongside humans, so the urge to be next to you is *literally* in their DNA. It's kind of their whole purpose in life - take away that purpose, and what's a poor pup to do? While it's great that they're intelligent, loyal, and obedient, all of this can lend itself to a pretty needy dog.

For the times you *have to* be away, here are a few ideas to lessen the blow:

- **Associate alone time with good things, like a puzzle toy or a special bone**
- **Use crate training to create a safe space**
- **Build confidence through Gradual Separation training**
- **Tire them out with plenty of exercise before you leave**

But honestly, the only sure way to avoid it is to be around consistently and regularly.

And allow me to be honest again - this whole separation anxiety thing gave me serious pause when it came to deciding if an Aussie was right for me. I've seen separation anxiety's ugly face, and the scars of war still mar my home.

Consider yourself warned.

The Triumvirate of Playfulness

All work and no play makes Jack a dull pup - and there's not a soul on Earth that would accuse an Australian Shepherd of being dull.

Aussies may be hard workers, but they're also some of the most playful, fun-loving companions you'll ever meet. They just *love* to play, and there are a few reasons for that.

Big ol' Brains.

Not to sound like a broken record, but once again I must bring up their history as herders. One of the job requirements is an ability to problem solve...sure, master said to bring the sheep inside the gate, but what if one got lost on the wrong side of a hill? Or if the whole herd splits in two?

Typically, the dogs that found joy in puzzling out solutions were the ones most successful at their jobs, so naturally, they were the ones prioritized for breeding. Aussies are not only able to handle a challenge, but also deeply *crave* one. And just like humans, games and play give them a satisfying way to exercise those critical thinking skills.

Boundless Energy.

To do their jobs, Aussies needed stamina for the long hours of herding and endless running about. That bottomless energy reserve is still baked into their DNA, and these pups can get restless if they don't have a way

of burning it all off. Moving about during playtime is a great way to cure that restlessness, as it's a great way to unleash (no pun intended) some of those massive energy stores.

Plus, their strong prey drive - that uncontrollable urge to chase a squirrel up a tree or lunge at the neighbor's cat - makes games like fetch or tug-of-war especially irresistible.

Capacity to Connect.

Okay, listen... I'm so sorry to have to bring this up again, but it really is responsible for so much of their personality. Their herding heritage also resulted in dogs bred to be deeply connected to their masters. And playtime isn't just about movement and mental stimulation, but is a way of building and strengthening emotional bonds - In short, when Aussies play, they connect, same as people.

Putting it All Together

This lively cocktail of brains, energy, and heart all culminates in a super playful and fun-loving dog. Aussies are game (pun *is* intended) for just about any kind of fun! They could play fetch all day, race around an agility course, even partake in a few rounds of hide and seek (*highly* recommended if you need a good laugh). They also like to learn and perform fun and interesting tricks, and relish the opportunity to race about the dog park, making new four-legged friends and tearing up the turf.

So, if you're thinking about getting an Aussie, you'd better be ready to have some serious fun. Sure, they're a hard-working dog, but they play just as hard as they work.

(Plus, the more you play with them, the fewer walks you'll have to take them on.)

A Trusted Guardian, and a Loyal Friend for Life

Herding dogs not only have to move their herds around, but must keep them safe from the many dangers that abound in the world. Whether the danger be predators or treacherous terrain, these dogs are bred to stay alert and protect their charges. Combine this with their fierce loyalty, and you get a pup who is always on guard, ever watchful.

This vigilance also means that they're not exactly social butterflies, at least when it comes to strangers. No, they're not aggressive, but they can be a bit standoffish around new people. As loving and playful as they are with their loved ones, their top priority isn't making new friends; it's keeping the ones they have safe from harm.

Behind that initially frosty demeanor, you'll find a highly empathetic and understanding companion. Australian Shepherds are bred to be tuned in to both their master and their herd and, because of this, are especially skilled at picking up on social and emotional cues that other dogs may miss.

Picture This...

You've just come home from work, and you've had just about the most *awful* day. Your Aussie greets you at the door, and right away she can tell that you're feeling down. So, she gives you a minute to rest and unwind before the afternoon walk, trying not to be as pushy and demanding as she usually is. Instead, she follows you quietly to the couch and waits patiently for your signal.

Fifteen minutes later, you're finally ready for y'all's walk, so you leash up and the two of you make your way down the road. That's when you notice a stranger approaching up the sidewalk - you think nothing of it, distracted by the worries of the day, but your Aussie knows something isn't right. As the stranger nears, their hand reaches into their jacket - suddenly your pup is barking and yipping, making all sorts of noise and you notice the stranger has veered uncomfortably close. But all that racket makes the stranger jump to the side, pulling an empty hand from their jacket and hurrying along in a panic. Crisis averted, your Aussie wags her tail contentedly as she trots alongside, satisfied at having fulfilled her duties.

You're finally back home, but your hard day on top of the walk has drained you of your life force. You sink into the couch with your Aussie following suit, and she lays her head warmly on your lap. As you stroke her fur contentedly, you soon begin to feel yourself unravel. She senses this too, but still feels like you could use a bit of cheering up - and so she disappears for a moment, returning with her favorite toy and dropping it at your feet. She bows playfully before you, her tail wagging as she eggs you on with short little yaps. You sigh and pick up the toy, resigning yourself to play.

In no time at all, you find yourself laughing and joyful and lost in the game, the worries of your day having melted away.

In short, if you give her the time, energy, and attention she needs, an Australian Shepherd will always have your back.

Coming to a Decision

So, if you're ready for a neurotic genius with a work ethic that'd put a Puritan to shame, then an Australian Shepherd might just be the perfect dog for you!

I think I'm ready. Sitting here with my Goldie, I realize how accustomed I've become to life with a senior dog. Shifting gears won't be easy - not only will I be adopting a puppy again, but one that's especially energetic and demanding.

Still, I remember that Goldie wasn't always like this - we used to hike through the woods for hours, the girl happily off leash and darting in and out of the trees and racing up steep inclines. I'd take her to the beach sometimes, where she'd leap impossibly high in the air, twisting about like a fish in flight before splashing back down into the surf. Whenever we'd go to the dog park (which was obnoxiously often), she'd usually disregard other dogs and drop tennis ball after tennis ball at my feet, demanding I throw. And I recall all those nights when it was still just the two of us, her snuggling up into my arms, and we'd fall fast asleep.

Goldie is my Gold Standard for what a dog should be, and an Australian Shepherd sounds a lot like how my old girl used to be. So maybe, I'm more ready than I think - I just need to give this new pup as much time and affection as I gave Goldie, then my return on investment will be high indeed.

But Aussies aren't for everyone. When choosing a new dog, it's important to look beyond the breed's traits, and take a gander at your own personality - an Australian Shepherd is perfect for the outdoorsy, adventurous type, but if you're more of a homebody couch potato, maybe a pug is more your speed. (Fun fact: pugs were bred to be companions to Chinese royalty, and therefore expect to languish on silk cushions while being hand-fed delicacies all day - but I'm sure lounging on the couch and sharing your potato chips would suffice.)

So, to you all, I say this: when trying to find the perfect dog, look to yourself - what are you like?

Me? I'm a neurotic genius with a powerful work ethic (or so I'd like to think), and too am cold around strangers but fiercely loyal with my friends and family. Do I like to play? Oh, you bet I'm one silly bitch - and this bitch could use another silly bitch.

No one, *no one*, will ever replace my Goldie, my most loyal and steadfast friend these past 12 years. But maybe an Australian Shepherd, with their high-level needs and propensity for frivolity, can distract me from my broken heart and be the new friend I'm so desperately going to need.

Loyalty. Energy. Emotional Depth. Intelligence. Playfulness. These are the things that make an Australian Shepherd. If you think you have what it takes, then go for it - If you do, I believe you'll find as much joy as I have with my dear, sweet Goldie.