

5- German Shepherds



German shepherds are loyal, faithful and devoted human companions.

Breed Profile

Since his rise to movie fame in the early 1920s, the German shepherd has become a favorite breed for [families](#), law enforcement and the disabled. Also known as the Alsatian, the German shepherd has consistently been one of the top 10 companion dogs in the United States and is a member of the "[herding](#)" class. Despite the similarity in appearance to the wolf, the German shepherd is a loyal, faithful and devoted human companion and, with proper training, can perform nearly any task.

The German shepherd was one of the top 10 breeds for the year 2007.

History and Origin

Prior to the late 1800s, sheep herding dogs were randomly bred, and only those that worked well were selected. As the 20th century approached, a strict breeding program was undertaken in Germany to develop the current randomly bred shepherd dog into a more uniform herding dog with versatility and intelligence. The newly developed German shepherd breed progressed and gained in popularity until the early 1900s. When World War I broke out in 1914, all things German became taboo; even German language courses were dropped from school curriculums. The fate of the German shepherd dog was in doubt. In order to save the breed, the [American Kennel Club](#), which had registered the breed in 1912, temporarily changed the name to the shepherd dog. After the war, however, the original name was reinstated. In Britain, the name was changed to the Alsatian, although the German shepherd dog name was finally reinstated in 1979.

In the 1950s and 60s, Americans became interested in the German shepherd dog, and large numbers were imported. A syndicated television show and a number of movies starring [Rin Tin Tin](#), a descendent of the canine movie star from the 1920s helped spur the renewed interest.

Over the years, German shepherds have become useful as guide dogs for the blind, deaf and other handicapped individuals because of their intelligence, trainability, well-rounded temperament, as well as their ability to get along well with people. The [military](#) and police force employ the breed for scent-discrimination to track criminals, drugs, weapons, bombs, and to find people buried in debris of earthquakes or other disasters.

Appearance and Size

The German shepherd dog is medium to large size with erect pointed ears, a long body, and a weather resistant coat. A thick stiff outer coat covered by a softer inner one makes the German shepherd readily able to withstand extreme climates. The most popular colors are black and tan or a mixture with a dark saddle. White shepherds are not acceptable colors for showing but are

becoming popular pets.

The German shepherd dog is typically 22 to 26 inches from the ground to the top of the shoulder. The normal adult weight is 75 to 90 pounds.

Personality

The German shepherd dog is very intelligent, easy to train, powerful and elegant. Though not overly affectionate, shepherds are loyal and faithful. The breed is renowned as a [police dog](#) and is often used in search and rescue missions. The German shepherd is also a popular companion dog, family member, assistance dog and guard dog.

Home and Family Relations

Due to their tolerant nature, German shepherds are excellent pets for [children](#) and are natural protectors. With proper training, the shepherd is an effective and imposing guard dog.

Training

Training should begin early in life. Untrained shepherds have a tendency to be difficult to handle and control. Since shepherds are intelligent and eager to learn, they can be trained to do a variety of tasks. They perform well in sentry duty, police work, tracking, obedience, [search and rescue](#) as well as assistance dogs for the disabled. Originally trained as a herder, the breed is still used in this capacity in some areas.

Special Care

German shepherds do not require any special care. Daily grooming will help keep their coat clean and healthy.

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Common Diseases and Disorders

Even though the German shepherd dog is a strong muscular breed, they may be prone to a variety of ailments.

- [Gastric torsion](#), also known as bloat, is a life-threatening sudden illness associated with the stomach filling with air and twisting.
- [Hip dysplasia](#) is a malformation of the hip joint that results in pain, lameness and arthritis.
- [Elbow dysplasia](#) is the abnormal development of certain parts of the elbow joint during the growing phase.
- [Epilepsy](#) is a seizure disorder, which develops between the ages of 2 to 5 years.
- [Panosteitis](#) is an inflammation of the long bones during growth. It results in pain and lameness until the dog matures.
- [Pyoderma](#) refers to deep skin infections.

- [Hot spots](#) are areas of itchy moist skin irritation.
- [Pannus](#) is a disease of the eye resulting in inflammation.
- [Corneal dystrophy](#) is a primary, inherited, bilateral (both sides), symmetrical condition of the cornea that is not accompanied by corneal inflammation or systemic disease.
- [Degenerative myelopathy](#) is a progressive degenerative disease of the spinal cord that slowly results in weakness and eventually inability to use the rear legs.

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- [Intervertebral disk disease](#) is a disorder that affects the spinal disks resulting in pain, difficulty walking and possibly paralysis.
- [Diabetes](#) is a disease of the pancreas related to insufficient amounts of insulin production.
- [Pancreatic insufficiency](#) is another pancreatic disease that results in inability to digest food properly.
- Malassezia Dermatitis - is a yeast infection of the skin caused by Malassezia pachydermatitis.
- [Food Allergy](#) can occur in some pets. Affected pets develop skin lesions secondary to some food ingredients
- Perianal Fistula - is an infection and development of fistulas of the anal glands and tissues around the anal area.
- Aortic Stenosis - this disease is caused by stenosis of the aorta and causing symptoms such as weakness, collapse and sudden death.
- Pericardial Effusion – is an accumulation of fluid within the pericardial space. It can be caused by tumors of the heart or idiopathic (no known cause).
- Congenital Idiopathic [Megaesophagus](#) - is a dilatation of the esophagus caused by decreased contraction of the muscles, causing food regurgitation.
- [Lymphocytic plasmacytic enteritis](#) (LPE) is a form of inflammatory bowel disease
- [Lick granuloma](#) is a condition in which the dog licks an area excessively, usually on the front leg, until a raised, firm ulcerated lesion is formed.
- [Anal Sac Adenocarcinoma](#) is an adenocarcinoma of the anal glands.
- [Testicular tumors](#) are tumors that involve the testicles in intact male dogs.
- [Dwarfism](#) is a deficiency of growth hormone (GH), which is normally secreted by the pituitary gland.
- [Cataracts](#) cause the lens of the eye to lose transparency and can result in blindness.
- [Lens luxation](#) is a dislocation or displacement of the lens within the eye.

In addition, German shepherds have a higher incidence of allergies, [ear infections](#) and malignant cancer such as [hemangiosarcoma](#) and [Lymphoma](#).

Life Span

The average life span for a German shepherd dog is 10 to 13 years.
