



RFCC Australian Shepherds Tips and Tricks



Katie Frey
21888 County Road I-50, West Unity, OH 43570
(419) 572-6171 katiefrey25@gmail.com
www.rfccaustralianshepherds.com

Congratulations on choosing your new Aussie puppy! It is my belief that you are the right kind of family for an Australian Shepherd and I hope you have done your homework on the traits of the breed. The following are a few tips and ideas I have collected, learned, and experienced over the years. They are intended only as a help and will not necessarily hold true for you and your dog. Please don't hesitate to call me with questions about your puppy/dog as I will help you any way I can to have a successful relationship!

Feeding:

I feed **NutriSource Small/Medium Breed Puppy** until the puppy turns 1 year of age and then switch my dogs to NutriSource Grain Free Formula. NutriSource is a premium quality dog food made with highly digestible ingredients. It is made in Minnesota, so US quality standards are followed. There are several premium foods on the market, and you are welcome to choose your own. Meat should be the first ingredient listed. Meat-meal or meat by-product are not the same thing but are usually from the left-over parts which are not as digestible but boost the protein level for the label. Grains should not be high up on the ingredient chart if included in the formula. When more of what a puppy/dog eats is digestible, there is less waste coming out the other end! This also means less work for you! You will pay more for high-quality food, but you should feed less (since more is digested, they eat less) and research has proven that over the lifetime of your pet, your vet bills will be lower on average than dogs fed lower quality food. I am sending enough food with you, so that your puppy can make the transition to a new home, without the added stress of changing to a new food. If you do change foods, mixing the new with the old and gradually increasing the percentage of new food in the mix will make the transition easier on your puppy's digestive system and reduce the likelihood of diarrhea.

My practice has been to feed 3 times a day, though 2 times works as well. You will have to transition them to your schedule. I allow them to eat all they want in a half hour. They tend to eat, then play, then eat, etc. Feeding a measured amount, on a schedule, allows you to control how much food your puppy/dog gets to maintain a healthy weight, and it also makes it easier to get a puppy on a regular schedule for going to the bathroom. Follow the recommendations on your puppy's food, but if your puppy still seems hungry after eating, or downs their food in a very short time, you may need to increase the quantity of food or the number of feedings.

Heartworm:

Collie breeds (including Aussies) are known for being sensitive to the drug commonly used for heartworm medication called Ivermectin. Sensitivities include symptoms from vomiting to seizures and can potentially cause death. Some vets are not familiar with this, so make sure your vet is aware of this trait. My dogs have been genetically tested for this gene (MDR1), and Ryder and Rayne carry one copy. I give my dogs **Interceptor** which is safe for both carriers and non-carriers of this gene. Other safe heartworm medications include Revolution and Sentinel. Trifexis is also safe for carriers of MDR1, but it can cause vomiting and adverse reactions in some dogs.

Housebreaking:

Crate training is the fastest and easiest method I have found for housebreaking as it plays on the puppy's natural instinct to not soil their bed. A crate also provides a place where a puppy can feel safe and protected, and where you know your puppy cannot get into anything they shouldn't when you are not around. The first thing a puppy will have to do upon waking is go to the bathroom. When you get home, pick the puppy up and take them immediately outside. While loose in the house, watch for sniffing and circling as this is the most likely sign your puppy will give you that they have to go potty. Your puppy will learn much faster if you go out with them every time in the beginning and tell them how good they are when they go. Your exuberant praise when they potty outside, combined with your disappointment when they potty inside, should help your puppy figure out quickly what makes you happy and Aussie's want to make us happy! I've been told that you can figure on about 1 hour of bladder control for each month of age, until about 8 months (8 hours). Puppies/dogs should not be expected to hold their bladder for more than 8 hours.



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Socialization:

I have given your puppy opportunity to be handled by different people and they have been exposed to other dogs. If their education in socialization doesn't continue, you could still end up with a dog that doesn't react well to strangers. I also recommend taking them for car rides; this will help them learn to be ok away from home and in different situations. It is the nature of the breed to be reserved around others, but they should never nip or bite. How you play with your puppy while young will make a big difference in how they act as adults. Take them for walks, go to parks, ball games, any place you can where there are unusual noises, lots of people, other animals, strange smells, etc. However, always make sure you have the puppy on a leash in these situations so that you are in control. If you routinely give your puppy these experiences when they are young, then you will be able to do this when they are adults. Aussies want to be wherever you are!

Obedience:

I encourage you and your puppy to go through obedience training. Your confidence in your dog will be greatly increased when you know they will obey the basic commands, and likewise, your puppy's intelligence will be stimulated by learning new things. Remember, you have a herding dog, and you will learn how to discourage those "herding traits" that are not well liked by humans (nipping at the heels or chasing cars), while encouraging the ones that are (trainability, number of words which are understood, desire to please). You also have a smart puppy that needs an outlet for that intelligence. If not provided with intellectual stimulation, the puppy will find their own outlets, and chances are you won't like them.

Rough play as a puppy can create a more aggressive adult. Play is good, however rough play that makes the puppy growl and snap is not. The cute habits, such as the puppy grabbing your cuff or jumping up on you, are not so cute when they reach adulthood. Remember, if you don't want to live with it for the whole of your dog's life, you should not let them do it the first time. It will be easier to stop a behavior in its tracks as a puppy than to break a dog of a habit it has had for years. Ideally, play time should also be training time too. Throw the ball but give a sit command before you throw it and a release command to go get it. Make your puppy think during exercise. Also, try to think like a puppy. The puppy will not understand if called over to you for a scolding for something they did "over there". They will associate the scolding with coming to you. Puppies live in the moment. Ask yourself what the puppy is thinking at "this" moment and what you can do to get them to think about what you want them to do.

Exercise:

Herding dogs are used to working all day. The hard-working lines of Australian Shepherds have energy to spare, while the show lines don't tend to have as much. I've bred mine to be somewhere between the two and your puppy can fall anywhere in the spectrum. Almost always, the things that a puppy or dog does that we can't stand are related to energy that is not properly channeled. You cannot expect an Aussie to sit in a crate all day and then be content to sit by the TV and watch the news with you once you get home. If you give your puppy enough of an outlet for their energy, they won't have the inclination to dig up the flower bed or chase the neighbor's car. If not exercised properly, they will once again put that intelligence to good use in developing habits that you don't want.

Grooming:

Brushing regularly will keep mats and tangles out of your dog's coat, and most hair out of your house. If you wait until mats are present, brushing will be a painful and unwanted process for you and your dog. Start young and make brushing part of your regular routine. Once or twice a week, use a slicker brush. Shedding is reduced by feeding a high-quality food and regular brushing, but it is normal for a dog to lose some hair most of the time. In the spring, your dog will lose much of their undercoat. Using an undercoat rake during the spring shed will remove most loose hair and leave less in your house. I only bathe my dogs when they start to smell like a dog or when they get unusually dirty.

Good luck and best wishes with your new addition!

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