

## Gerberian Shepsky



By Sarah Mouton Dowdy

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What do you get when you mix a [German Shepherd](#) with a [Siberian Husky](#)? A dog that's easy on the eyes but tough to pronounce: the Gerberian Shepsky. No one knows exactly when or why the first Shepsky was bred, but some have guessed the goal was to create a smaller German Shepherd with the piercing blue eyes of a Siberian Husky.

The Gerberian Shepsky is still a relatively rare crossbreed, and because there isn't a breed standard, it's difficult to make definitive statements regarding appearance and temperament. However, we can make plausible predictions based on what we know of the two extremely popular and well-documented parent breeds.

Generally speaking, Shepskies are medium-size dogs (40–60 pounds) with super-size amounts of energy and intelligence. The offspring of two working breeds, Gerberian Shepskies need outlets for keeping their bodies and minds active, and do best with experienced dog parents who can provide early and consistent positive training.

### **Caring for a Gerberian Shepsky**

In the absence of a breed standard for the Gerberian Shepsky, it's helpful to brush up on the parent breeds to get a general idea of what to expect.

According to the American Kennel Club (AKC) [breed standard](#), German Shepherds should have a personality marked by confidence, and a direct and fearless expression. Noble, focused, and reserved, the breed isn't known for making what the AKC calls "immediate and indiscriminate friendships." These qualities, along with physical characteristics like their large size, muscular build, and impressive agility, made German Shepherds ideal sheep herding dogs.

Though similarly bred for a specific job (endurance sled pulling), Siberian Huskies are far more outgoing than German shepherds. The [AKC breed standard](#) describes them as friendly, gentle, and eager to please.

As working dogs, German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies top the charts when it comes to energy levels, [intelligence](#), and mental and physical stimulation needs. And while both breeds excel at shedding their double coats (you'll want to keep your lint roller handy), they otherwise don't require a lot of grooming.

Despite their job-focused history, German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies can be loyal, loving family companions, including in families with children. Their offspring, the Gerberian Shepsky, will need early socialization and [consistent positive reinforcement training](#) to thrive, so they aren't recommended for first-time pet parents.

## Gerberian Shepsky Health Issues

German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies are [generally healthy breeds](#), and the same goes for Gerberian Shepskies, [which can live 10–14 years](#). Still, Gerberian Shepskies can inherit the same health problems to which their parents are prone.

### Hip Dysplasia

[Hip dysplasia](#) is a condition in which the hip joint doesn't develop properly and is characterized by a looseness that [leads to osteoarthritis](#). It's more common in [large dogs](#), and at-risk breeds like German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies should be evaluated for the disease before they're bred to avoid passing the condition to their Shepsky puppies.

Common signs include:

- Limping
- Reluctance to get up or jump
- Shifting weight to front legs

- Loss of muscle mass in back legs
- Hip pain

Mild cases are treated with interventions like physical therapy and anti-inflammatory drugs. Surgery, including total hip replacement, may be necessary in more severe cases.

## **Elbow Dysplasia**

Similar to hip dysplasia, [elbow dysplasia](#) refers to an elbow joint that hasn't developed as it should, and it's one of the most common causes of osteoarthritis in canine elbows. Elbow dysplasia is also a hereditary condition.

Common signs include:

- Limping, especially after exercise
- Reluctance or unwillingness to walk or exercise
- Stiffness in the elbow joint
- Grating or crackling sound during elbow joint movement

Anti-inflammatory drugs can help with the pain and inflammation, but surgery is recommended before osteoarthritis develops.

## **Degenerative Myelopathy**

[Degenerative myelopathy \(DM\)](#) is an inherited, progressive disease of the spinal cord similar to Lou Gehrig's disease (ALS) in people. Affected dogs typically don't show signs of illness until they're 8 years old or older.

The signs of DM often start in one of the back limbs, then progress to include the other. These signs include:

- Difficulty getting up
- Weakness in back legs
- Uncoordinated movements
- Muscle loss
- Scuffed toenails or wounds to the top of the paws on back limbs from dragging the feet (secondary to loss of feeling)

While there are ways to manage the signs of DM and even slow their progression, there isn't a cure.

## Eye Problems

There are several hereditary eye problems more common in German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies that may also affect their offspring.

- **[Pannus](#)**, or chronic superficial keratitis, is an incurable eye disease that occurs most often in German Shepherds. Affected dogs typically have a pinkish film that spreads from the outside edge of the eye toward the center. As the disease progresses, the film becomes opaque, and the cornea becomes dark and pigmented. Without treatment, it can lead to blindness. Topical medications can slow progression and even achieve remission.
- **[Juvenile hereditary cataracts](#)** have been diagnosed in both German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies. Affecting both eyes symmetrically, these cataracts impair vision by clouding the lens of the eye. Juvenile cataracts typically begin forming before the dog is 1 year old, and progress to blindness by age 2 or 3. Your vet may refer you to a board-certified veterinary ophthalmologist for treatment, which may involve surgery.
- **[Corneal dystrophy](#)** is a relatively common inherited progressive disease observed in the Shepsky's parent breeds. It affects both eyes and is categorized into three types based on location: epithelial (affects cell formation), stromal (causes cornea to become cloudy), and endothelial (affects cells in cornea lining). German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies are predisposed to epithelial and stromal dystrophies.
- **[Progressive retinal atrophy \(PRA\)](#)** is an umbrella term for a group of genetic disorders in which the rods and cones of the retina don't develop properly in young puppies (early-onset PRA) or they begin to deteriorate in adulthood (late-onset PRA). Siberian Huskies are prone to the latter, and signs of disease include reluctance to go outside at night or into a dark room; clumsiness; and [cataracts](#). There is no treatment for PRA, and it eventually results in vision loss.

## What to Feed a Gerberian Shepsky

Every Gerberian Shepsky is different, so it's important to partner with your veterinarian to determine the type of food that will be nutritionally complete and balanced for your dog's age, size, and health history. You should feed your dog a [well-balanced, nutritious dog food](#).

## How to Feed a Gerberian Shepsky

Most adult Gerberian Shepskies should eat two meals a day: once in the morning and again in the evening. Because puppies have a higher metabolism than adult dogs, it's generally best to [feed your Shepsky puppy three times](#) a day: morning, afternoon, and evening.

### **How Much Should You Feed a Gerberian Shepsky?**

The nutritional label on your dog's food bag is a great place to find portion recommendations. It should include a daily feeding guide that will give you a general idea of how much to feed your Gerberian Shepsky based on their weight.

For a more accurate amount, ask your veterinarian. They will tailor their recommendation not only to your dog's weight but also to their [body condition score](#), lifestyle, and health.

### **Nutritional Tips for a Gerberian Shepsky**

If your Gerberian Shepsky is eating a complete and balanced diet of dog food approved by the [Association of American Feed Control Officials \(AAFCO\)](#), they shouldn't need anything extra. However, it's possible your vet will recommend a nutritional supplement if your pet develops a health condition.

## **Behavior and Training Tips for Gerberian Shepskies**

All dogs benefit from early socialization and training, but these investments are particularly important with dogs like Gerberian Shepskies, which rate high in intelligence, energy, and activity needs.

### **Gerberian Shepsky Personality and Temperament**

Commenting on the Shepsky's personality and temperament with confidence is difficult. "German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies have been bred for generations to acquire specific traits, resulting in breed standard for each," explains Melissa McMath Hatfield, MS, CBCC-KA, CDBC, owner of [Loving Dogs](#) in Fayetteville, Arkansas. "Mixing their traits will result in a combination of traits from each breed, but there isn't a breed standard yet. Temperament will ultimately vary from puppy to puppy."

Hatfield notes that the parent breeds are loyal, playful, and affectionate with their family members. However, German Shepherds are more reserved around people and pets they don't know, while Siberian Huskies are typically very outgoing and accepting of strangers.

“Anyone considering adding a Shepsky to their family should be aware of the parent breed traits first,” Hatfield adds. “If you feel confident you could live with a German Shepherd and a Siberian Husky, you’re well on your way to being an appropriate Shepsky parent. I would also highly recommend visiting with Gerberian Shepsky pet parents and breeders before making a final decision.”

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### **Gerberian Shepsky Behavior**

Shepskies aren’t recommended for first-time dog parents. These dogs need copious amounts of mental and physical activity—a holdover from their parents’ working days as sheep herders and sled dogs. “A dog who is mentally or physically bored or frustrated can develop behavior problems,” Hatfield says. “They may make up their own games and entertainment, such as destroying your couch.”

Bred to be loyal companions and helpers, German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies prefer to be near their families. Being left alone for long periods can lead to behavior issues. Siberian Huskies also tend to be highly vocal, but proper training can help keep the peace in your home.

### **Gerberian Shepsky Training**

Like all dogs, Shepskies go through a critical development period from birth to around 16 weeks, during which they learn how to interact with humans and other animals (among other things). “If puppies don’t get appropriate stimulation and exposure to the outside world in this critical period, they are candidates for behavior problems in adulthood,” Hatfield says. “That’s why it’s important to ask breeders how they approach this issue.”

German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies are typically eager to please their pet parents and are thus highly trainable. And due to their larger size and larger-than-life energy levels, obedience training is crucial. Consistent rewards-based training is the best approach, and the training process has the added benefit of providing Shepskies with some of the mental and physical stimulation they need.

### **Fun Activities for Gerberian Shepskies**

- [Walking](#)
- [Running](#)

- [Hiking](#)
- [Swimming](#)
- Camping
- Frisbee
- Nose work
- Obedience training
- Agility training
- [Food puzzles](#)

## **Gerberian Shepsky Grooming Guide**

The parent breeds of the Gerberian Shepsky were designed to be low-maintenance in the grooming department, as this is an important quality in a working dog. However, the amount of fur they shed probably wasn't as noticeable or problematic in their original outdoor settings as it will be in your home.

Still, weekly brushing, occasional baths, and a bit more attention during high-shedding times in the spring and fall should keep your pet—and your house—in good shape.

### **Skin Care**

Regular brushing isn't just good for your Shepsky's coat—it's also important for their skin, as it helps get rid of dry, dead skin flakes that can build up and cause irritation. This German Shepherd-Siberian Husky mix doesn't need regular baths, so just bathe them when they get particularly dirty, smelly, or if they are starting to itch.

### **Coat Care**

Both German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies have medium-length double coats that shed regularly. Their Shepsky puppies should be brushed at least once a week and bathed a few times a year.

### **Eye Care**

Given the number of eye conditions to which the parent breeds are predisposed, it's important to partner with your veterinarian to monitor your Shepsky's eye health. Call your vet if you notice anything out of the ordinary.

### **Ear Care**

Talk to your veterinarian about how often you should be [cleaning your Shepsky's ears](#). Their recommendation will depend on several factors, including how much ear wax your pet produces and what kinds of activities they regularly enjoy. For instance, [dogs that love swimming](#) may need more frequent ear cleanings.

If you notice your dog's ears are red, painful, or smell bad, skip cleaning their ears and call the vet instead. These are all [signs of a potential ear infection](#).

## Considerations for Pet Parents

The parent breeds of the Gerberian Shepsky were initially bred to be working dogs. And while you can take the dog out of the work, you can't necessarily take the work out of the dog.

"German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies are high-energy dogs that require daily physical and mental interaction," Hatfield says. "Potential pet parents need to honestly ask themselves if they're willing and able to provide their Shepsky with activities that stimulate the German Shepherd's keen ability to focus on complicated tasks, and the Siberian Husky's incredible long-distance endurance. These qualities are at the core of these breeds, and tapping into them is an important part of keeping these dogs healthy and happy."

When it comes to the right environment for a Shepsky, where you live isn't as important as how you live (although with their thick double coats, a cooler climate is certainly ideal). As long as you provide ample activities for their bodies and brains, along with proper socialization and training, Shepskies can adapt to urban apartment living.

"Play days are a great option if pet parents have the time and energy," Hatfield says. "Even a half day of play two days a week can make a difference in the dog's overall mental and physical health. And for a mature dog, two walks a day and a game of fetch should be sufficient."

The Shepsky's parent breeds can be affectionate companions and even playmates to children. But Hatfield notes that due to their energy and size, they may not be the best pet for homes with very small children (and perhaps even very small pets, like cats). And because these breeds are so attached to their human companions, they do best in homes where they don't have to spend large swaths of time alone.



# Gerberian Shepherd FAQs

## Are Gerberian Shepskies rare?

Although it's difficult to guesstimate the Gerberian Shepsky population, it's probably safe to assume the breed is still relatively uncommon.

## Are Gerberian Shepskies friendly?

In the absence of a breed standard, it's hard to say what exactly a Gerberian Shepsky's temperament will be. German Shepherds tend to be reserved when it comes to making new friends, but Siberian Huskies are famously friendly dogs. There's no way to know which temperament will be passed to your pet. However, both breeds can form loyal, loving bonds with their human companions.

## Do Gerberian Shepskies shed a lot?

Shepskies have just the right genes to shed a lot. German Shepherds and Siberian Huskies shed fur regularly, and that fur *really* flies during high-shedding times once or twice a year. These periods may require extra brushing and a backup lint roller to keep their flying fur under control.

Featured Image: Adobe/otsphoto

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