



Congratulations on the purchase of your Livestock Guardian Puppy!! We have worked hard to ensure your puppy has been given the best start possible. Your puppy has been eating solid, dry food for almost 2 weeks, and supplemented with a RAW diet. It has been closely observed for guardian skills, introduced to guarding livestock, basic manners, respecting fence boundaries, walking on leash, handled daily, and more. We have done some simple personality tests on your puppy to help us make recommendations for the pups that would best suit your farm. Because your puppy is still young, however, once you take him or her home, the new environment and farm atmosphere will continue to shape and mold its personality.

This breed of LGD possesses natural guarding instincts that are quite fascinating and amazing! Some dogs, however, can go a little wayward and may require a bit more guidance than others during the early months. These dogs are not considered “mature” until 3 years of age. Most females are a bit earlier, while males are a bit later. If you want to help ensure success as your puppy grows, there are a few tips we would like to offer. These tips are based on the regrets and desires many LGD owners have had for their dogs, as well as our personal experience. There are never guarantees your dog will turn into a perfect guardian, but the chances increase tremendously when the pup is properly started, and then consistently guided as it matures.

Food: Your pup can be fed kibble or raw meats and bones (please educate yourself on raw diets before choosing this option). We have included some kibble to help you wean it over to the diet of your choice. As you select your food, though, be aware that your pup will likely reach between 85-130 lbs as an adult, depending on whether it is male or female. We highly recommend feeding the recommended amount, in 3 increments throughout the day. This will help your puppy quickly learn who you are, look forward to your presence, remind it of its position in “your” pack, and prevent it from being too standoffish as an adult. When the pup is about 4 months old, you could reduce to 2x daily feedings, and go from there.

Manners: Remember, your pup will grow to be quite large. Don’t allow it to do anything as a young pup that you don’t want it doing as a full-grown dog. This will create a much more pleasant mature LGD. Contrary to some beliefs, a few basic manners and commands will NOT ruin your puppy. A few recommendations include never allowing it jump on people, discourage licking in the face, teaching your puppy to “sit” prior to placing its food on the ground, and allowing you to pet it while it eats. I would also recommend not encouraging the puppy to chase people (something that can be challenging if you have children), or it could cause issues with your livestock later. Furthermore, you (and your vet!) will be very thankful later if you do some regular handling sessions such as picking up its paws, looking in its ears, opening its mouth to see inside, brushing it all over (don’t forget the tail!). Even doing this handling lesson once or twice a week will create a much more tolerant dog.

Chasing: The biggest complaint we have seen regarding immature LGDs is the dreaded “chasing chickens” issue. Your pup has been around poultry since the night it was born. For the last almost 3 weeks, it has been living peacefully with our turkeys in the orchard and gardens. HOWEVER, don’t let this fool you. Almost every puppy will eventually reach a time during its adolescence (usually around 5-7 months) where it suddenly realizes chasing chickens can be fun. The dogs are not killers by nature, but often the stress of being chased or jumped on will kill the chicken, and occasionally a pup will be caught eating it. If this happens, do not be discouraged. Be prepared. Have a plan ahead of time. Be vigilant so you are ready before it becomes a habit. We are happy to help you develop a plan so you are prepared. Just ask.

Boundaries: Like any dog, an LGD can be taught to respect property boundaries. The less fencing you have, the more work will be involved on your part. The second biggest complaint we have seen from LGD owners is after they turn their pup loose in their pasture, and the pup consistently escapes. This would potentially happen with any dog not properly taught. We recommend NOT turning your pup freely into a pasture for the first month or so. Rather, when it cannot be supervised, keep it in a safe, secure area, where it can see your livestock, but not chase or be bullied. When you do your chores, take the pup with you (on a leash, preferably). Show the pup your boundaries. Familiarize it with your routines. Allow supervised off-leash contact with the livestock. If the pup ever tries to leave the boundary, be ready to correct immediately. Feel free to discuss this issue with us, and we will be happy to provide training suggestions.

Guarding: While your puppy is very young and little, you will want to be very cautious about unsupervised exposure to your livestock. Large animals can kick, bite, or trample a young pup, while very small animals could be injured by the pup's playful behaviors. Some livestock, such as goats, tend to be natural bullies, and can ruin a young LGD for life by making it afraid of anything bigger than itself. Every situation is different, and we are happy to discuss your set-up and customized tips for you.

Barking: As a general rule, there are two types of guardian dogs. One type prefers not to fight, but uses a big bark to warn off predators. The other is on the more aggressive side, and may bark less but is quicker to attack. We have carefully chosen genetics that prefer to avoid fights if at all possible. That means, however, that the dog will bark. Some bark more than others. You will find, however, that it doesn't bark out of simple boredom like many pets. These dogs bark with a purpose. They bark at threats (or perceived threats). They also have different barks for different situations. You will find they have one sound when playing, a different sound when warning off a predator, and another "tattle-tale" sound to get your attention because something is amiss (ie animals got loose). If you are in a remote area, this shouldn't be an issue. If you are in a more populated area, you should be prepared to be a little less popular with your neighbors. There are steps you can take, however, to reduce the barking. Many people find success at teaching their dog to stop barking when given a certain cue or command. Feel free to contact us for ideas if necessary.

Indoors: On occasion, a dog may have to go inside. This is not going to ruin your pup. HOWEVER, we would never recommend making a habit of taking your dog inside on a regular basis. As of the time you picked your puppy up at our farm, it has never been indoors. An LGD cannot perform its guarding duties if it is locked in your house, and a good LGD will often be stressed when separated from its charges.

Bonding: There are a lot of myths regarding LGDs and human interaction. By its very nature, a dog can figure out its job. By allowing your dog to live with the livestock, it will naturally form a very close bond with the stock and the territory, and will naturally desire to protect both. Do not be afraid to interact with your puppy. An ignored dog can still make a great guardian, but often becomes fearful of people, which is not a good thing in the event you do need to handle the dog. Interact, teach it basic manners, feed and water it, walk it on a leash, and enjoy your puppy. Then, turn it back with the stock. The pup will quickly learn that you are fun and in charge when present, but it belongs with the livestock.

Gender Issues: Both males and females make excellent guardians. However, each has different issues you need to consider. In-tact males will have a greater desire to wander off, both to expand its territory and to find mates. Females are more content to stay home, and are usually more maternal. The maternal instinct can be good UNLESS she tries to steal babies or prevent their natural mothers from taking care of them. This should be discouraged. Be aware, also, that a female who normally refuses to allow access to other dogs, may INVITE other dogs into your pens when she is cycling. This is a big risk to your livestock, and to your female. A pregnant or nursing female often becomes much less focused on protecting your livestock, because she is more focused on keeping her pups safe. We highly recommend you have your pup spayed or neutered as soon as possible to prevent these problems.

Other dogs: Your puppy can be taught (accidentally or intentionally) whether or not to accept other dogs. If you expose your farm pets to the puppy on a regular basis, the pup will learn to accept them as it matures. The pup learns that those pets are part of the farm. If you try to encourage your pup to accept other pets, however,

(ie visitors, friends, family who want to bring their dog along), you will likely set yourself up for a problem. You would likely be teaching your dog that “strange dogs are allowed and acceptable,” which could easily endanger your livestock. As a side note, we do allow visitors to bring their dogs along, but we ask that they NEVER take their pet into the pastures with our LGDs, and if the pet is not well-behaved, it must on a leash (lest it taunt our dogs from the outside of the fence).

While this may sound like a great deal of work, it really isn't. Most of the guidance required for your pup just becomes part of your daily routine. While we can't guarantee your pup will turn out perfectly, we can guarantee that if you take the steps necessary now and for the next year (or so), you will greatly increase the abilities and skills of your pup. This animal should not be viewed as a “pet,” rather, you will want it to mature into a partner that protects your farm and your livestock from predators when you are not present. Your aim should not be perfect obedience or submission to you (like with many pets), rather you want a dog that matures into a confident, independent thinking, motivated protector. This doesn't happen overnight, and can take up to a couple of years, but the more effort you put into it, the better partner you will have in the long run. By following these simple tips, your puppy will very likely be starting to guard by 5-6 months of age. Just don't expect it to be a full, responsible partner until well after it is a year old.

Remember, as a customer of Red Gate Farm, you are welcome to call or e-mail us at any time if you have a concern or question. We would also greatly appreciate updates on your puppy and even photos of it working as it matures. Thank you for supporting our LGD program, and again, CONGRATULATIONS!!