

I Just Brought Home a Livestock Guardian Dog. Now What?

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I read this question almost every day on the various online livestock guardian dog forums. First, congratulations! Second, I hope you've done some basic groundwork and preparation. If not, you need to get busy.

Hopefully you located a healthy pup from a good breeder who chooses her breeding dogs carefully for their working behaviors, temperament, and soundness. Most importantly, if you want a good working LGD, you need to buy a pup from [a recognized LGD breed](#) or crossbred of recognized LGD breeds – and nothing else. Two previous posts can help folks still looking for a LGD pup: [Before You Buy a Livestock Guardian Dog or Puppy](#) and [Selecting a Working LGD Puppy](#).

### What Comes Next?

People are happy to give you advice; unfortunately, much of it is contradictory. [Myths and misconceptions](#) abound. If you bought your pup from a breeder with good working dogs, their advice will be enormously helpful.

Much of what you do is determined by the role you have in mind for your dog. LGD breeds can function in their traditional role as a full time, outdoor living livestock guardian; as a farm and family guardian who may live in areas right around the house and occasionally visit inside; or as a family companion dog who lives indoors.

For a more complete description of these roles and how to raise a pup for these different jobs see: [What is the Difference Between a Livestock Guardian, Farm and Family Guardian, or Family Companion](#). For our purposes here, I'm going to assume your new pup will be living and working outside full-time with stock.

### Housing

Where to keep the new addition? In the house? With livestock or poultry?

If he is to be a full time LGD he needs to be housed in a secure and safe area with a good shelter outside or inside a barn. Yes, even in the winter. As long as he is a minimum of 8 weeks old, healthy, and in suitable housing he will be fine outside even in winter, unless it is drastically and unusually frigid. LGD pups and dogs live outside across the northern US and in Canada.

It is better, for several reasons, if he is [12 weeks old](#), but in either case if you bring the pup inside the house you are setting his expectations of where he will be living and the eventual separation will be even harder later.

An area about 16 by 16 feet square is a suitable size for a very young pup's pen. Some folks construct a larger, permanent kennel that can be used when the adult dog needs to be confined. Livestock panels or chain link is often used. If you are worried about large predators and your LGD pup, make sure his pen is secure at night with a solid cover of stock panels, chain link, or a roof. Tarps are not sufficient protection from a larger predator.

Yes, he may cry at first – just like a new puppy in a crate in the house. But constantly responding to his cries or taking him to the house will make the eventual separation worse or condition him to escape to the house. Give him lots of attention in his place but don't reward constant cries. Sometimes it is helpful to place his pen out of sight of your comings and goings around the house. Don't let him live in your yard or hang out on your porch unless that is where you want him to work later.

## **Bonding to Stock or Poultry**

If your pup is destined to protect stock or poultry, he needs to be within sight and sound of them from the very beginning, if at all possible. Pups from working parents usually have excellent early socialization to stock.

Some folks have very reliable older animals that can serve as companions to a pup, but you also have to be careful of the larger animal bullying or injuring the puppy. It's never advisable to leave a pup completely alone with baby animals, new mothers, poultry, or stock that is not used to LGDs. Many folks keep their young dog near to stock or birds but without access to them unless they are being actively supervised. Puppy pens can be located right next to or inside your stock enclosure.

Take your pup with you when you do chores so you can supervise him and provide guidance. Some folks keep a young pup leashed to their belt while others let him drag a long line so that he can be caught if he starts chasing or other inappropriate behavior. Good behavior should be praised and bad behavior needs to be caught right in the act. Some folks sit out with the pup and their birds or animals to foster calm acceptance by both stock and dog.

In the homelands of these breeds, pups were never left alone with their sheep or goats but were always supervised by shepherds or older, reliable dogs. Many experienced owners do not believe LGDs are reliable until maturity at age 2 or so – especially in the absence of a good adult mentor dog or active supervision. Be especially careful with adolescent dogs during breeding or birthing times. This is especially unsettling to many dogs, which need to be closely supervised through their first season with birthing animals.

Poultry are the most challenging and non-traditional animals for LGDs to work with. A very young pup is often good with birds in the beginning but without careful supervision, as the pup gets older there will often be chasing or playing that may result in tragic consequences.

Be prepared that this particular role will take lots of time before the dog is reliable. And yes, many great adult LGDs have accidentally played with or licked a bird to death before they became reliable at age 2 or so.

## **Training and Socializing**

Even if your new pup is to be a full time LGD, he needs plenty of basic handling and training as well – just do it where he lives and works. Take your children with you when you do chores and work with the dog, so that he comes to know them as well. It's another myth that you should not give your LGD pup attention. LGDs always worked with shepherds. You want him to bond to you as well as his animals.

Even a working LGD should behave on a leash and have experiences being tethered and kenneled so he will cooperate in an emergency. And if he will need to visit the vet's office, practice some car trips. Lots of walks in pastures or fields will help burn off some of that puppy energy before it becomes destructive. Meaty bones are also good to occupy time.

If your dog will live in or around the house, you may want to take him to puppy classes and socialize him to people and places, although LGD breeds are not a good fit for places like dog parks. Most folks don't take full-time working dogs off the farm except to a vet.

## **Other Family or Farm Dogs**

Don't rush these introductions. Give everyone lots of time to settle and get used to each other through fences. Typically an older LGD will be kind to a young pup, but may need significant time to adjust to another adolescent or adult dog.

If your dog's job is to protect your stock, many experienced folks recommend that you don't allow him to play with your family dogs or other herding or hunting dogs. Yes he needs to know who they are and that they belong to you, but you don't want your pup picking up chasing or other bad habits from these dogs. You don't want him playing in your yard either. You also want him to protect your animals from dogs that threaten their stock. Definitely don't allow your pup to play with neighbor or strange dogs. Don't tolerate them on your property and make a show of chasing them away.

### **Fencing**

LGDs need to be securely fenced unless you live on a very large property without neighbors or graze on open range. Barbwire or weak fencing is escapable, and boundary training is not usually successful with these breeds, which were developed over centuries to work on very large, open spaces. These dogs seek to patrol and they can easily extend their zone of protection against predators two miles or more.

Pups should learn to respect fences right from the beginning so they don't establish habits of wandering and roaming as they mature – especially if they are intact. It's much harder to break a bad habit than to prevent it from being formed in the first place. Some folks find electric scare wires (top and bottom) or an invisible or radio fence system to be a good backup to physical fences when dogs are determined to escape.

Invisible fence alone is not recommended as many dogs will "take a hit" in pursuit of a threat or a female in heat. Invisible or poor fencing also allows predators inside your pastures, making your dog's job that much harder.

### **Problem-Solving Resources**

After a good start with your pup, there are excellent resources for help with solving specific problems or dealing with different situations as they develop.

### **Online**

Facebook group [Learning About LGDs](#) – reliable advice and a files section with articles from experienced members

Blog - [Predator Friendly Ranching](#) by Louise Liebenberg

[Lgd.org](#) - online library of articles by experienced LGD users

### **Books**

Jan Dohner. *Livestock Guardians: Using Dogs, Donkeys, and Llamas to Protect Your Herd*

*Farm Dogs: 93 Guardians, Herders, Terriers, and other Canine Working Partners*

Orysia Dawyjak. *Livestock Protection Dogs; Care, Selection, and Training*