

An Interview with a

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Breeder

**Ninebark
Aussies**

with Valerie Yates

Interview with a Breeder

with Valerie Yates of NineBark Aussies



Valerie Yates founded Ninebark Aussies in 2005, breeding 1 to 2 litters per year. Ninebark became a Hall of Fame Kennel with CNASA, ASCA, and USASA. Valerie is an AKC Breeder of Merit Silver and an ASCA Provisional Breeder Judge. Valerie holds a high-pressure job as a Writer/Editor in tech, and successfully raised twins with her husband, who is a Professor of Environmental Sciences.

Why the Australian Shepherd? And how long have you been in the Breed?

I've owned Aussies with my family since 1992, before they became a recognized breed with the CKC. We found them to be highly intelligent, trainable, biddable, loyal, and versatile. Not to mention attractive, with their individual markings and range of colors.

Why did you become a Breeder?

I've loved plants, animals, and insects — the natural world! — Since I could walk. I wanted to become a vet but sadly lacked the science ability and guidance to make it a reality. When our twins became old enough, I worked hard at establishing a kennel with the aim of immersing myself in my first love. Not the fixing and curing part like a vet would, but the creative and nurturing aspect of bringing lives and a vision into the world. I am especially proud that my daughter, who played an integral part in the nurturing component of Ninebark, has become a DVM.

What is the meaning behind your Kennel name?

It's challenging to find an available kennel name across registries in Canada and the US. Ninebark was available, and the play on words worked with my love of gardening and was a wink to dogs. Ninebark bushes are hardy like the Aussie breed, and you get the bark part I'm sure.

What is your Greatest achievement in the Breed?

I am very proud of having bred a Best of Breed winner at an ASCA National Specialty. I always dreamed of a BISS win in the US with a Canadian Bred dog, and when it happened, piloted by my excellent friend and co-owner Sarah Kalkes, I felt that Ninebark had made a little history. I felt like I could turn to other projects and goals with my remaining time in the breed.

What kind of Health testing do you do and Why?

Alongside OFA tests (Hips, Elbows, annual CAER), I typically do 5 or so DNA tests. These include MDR1, CEA, HC, PRA-prcd, DM. I might also test for PHA, which is a blood smear, and investigate hidden colors if I think I should, and maybe do OFA Cardiac. I feel these are the "core" tests, with a higher incidence of "abnormal" results for the breed in the OFA database.

At what age do you evaluate puppies and what are you evaluating them for?

I start observing at birth and watch throughout development. I take note of some basic behavior from birth on, from spiritedness, response to stress, settling ability, to eye contact, and begin observing basic movement and structure from 5 weeks. From 6 weeks I observe characteristics outside, including problem solving and braveness, begin observing movement, and start table training. At 7-8 weeks I take videos of movement, on leash and off, slowing down the video for analysis. For performance prospects I am looking for eye contact, following, persistence, and boldness, along with toy drive and a sound structure for impact sports. For conformation I am looking for converging front and rear, toeing out, nice pro sternum and shoulder layback, neck, acceptable markings, balance.

What advice would you give a first time Aussie owner?

Everyone says they can handle energy, but Aussies can be more energetic, smart, and destructive than you could ever think possible. They aren't the best starter breed, I recommend crate training, both to avoid damage and injury, and to teach self soothing skills to avoid separation anxiety. A structured socialization program and formal training are musts. And of course, get a well bred Aussie from a breeder who does health testing, as people have come to Ninebark after enormous financial outlays on veterinary help for their poorly bred Aussie.

What is your favorite thing Conformation or Performance? And Why?

I enjoy both! Titles on both ends show versatility. Doing performance with your Aussie builds a bond and it's amazing to see instinct kick in, in a channeled way. Conformation is also rewarding. If I were retired I would likely focus more on performance.



What aspect(s) do you think that Breeders need to improve on?

I think breeders need to improve transparency about health issues they've encountered, to help better the breed, seek mentorship to enhance their understanding of the breed standard, and strive for the total package, without sacrificing key elements, like temperament. I think breeders need to work on improving fronts and rears. As a judge, I frequently experience poor temperaments. Each time I go to the vet, tech and vets remark on how good the temperaments are on my Aussies, and never fail to lament how terrible temperaments are in the breed. That makes me sad.

Finish this sentence "I will know I'm a successful Aussie Breeder when _____"

I achieved many of my goals and dreams in Aussies, but don't feel like I'm done yet. I appreciate the generous guidance I received from breeders like Shawna Wiebe and Betsy Atkinson years ago, and feel that I need to "give back" to clubs and other breeders. After nearly 20 years, I have a new set of goals for my program, and hope I will be able to realize some of these, despite knowing that I'd likely need another 20 years to do this.

Photo Courtesy of Valerie Yates • Henna "ASCA HOF ChickC AOM Ch Sunrise Little Red Hen ROMX I NJ-N JJ-N DJ TKN ITD HIC"

