

Let's talk about Akitas

LARGE PRINT VERSION

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Are you thinking of adopting an Akita? Then read on...



Cute aren't they!? But believe us, they will
GROW! A LOT!

Most people may have seen the film about the Akita in Japan whose human died, and he waited every day at the train station for him, till he too passed away (Hachi: A Dog's Tale, and by all means watch it! Don't forget the tissues though and apologies for the spoiler) and yes these dogs are **super loyal** by breed. Whilst also being capable of bringing down a bear...



[Hachi the Akita](#)

They **adore who they decide are their pack**, and are often **wary of other dogs** by nature/breeding. But there is a lot more to being the 'human' for an Akita than having a dog who's tendency would be to defend you and your children with their lives. (Though adoptions of adult Akitas to small children is rare, by a responsible rescue anyway, due to the danger of them being accidentally knocked over rather than harmed by biting, because most Akitas are pretty big, and often exuberant characters with their 'humans'.)

Akita breed facts	
other names	American Akita and Great Japanese Dog
area of origin	Akita prefecture, northern Japan
breed group	working
height at withers	24–28 inches (61–71 cm)
weight	70–130 pounds (32–59 kg)
life span	10–14 yrs
Did you know?	Perhaps the best-known Akita is Hachikō, who displayed incredible devotion to his owner, Hidesaburō Ueno, a professor at the University of Tokyo . Hachikō (affectionately called "Hachi") would wait patiently at Shibuya train station for Ueno's return home. On May 21, 1925, Ueno died at work, and for the next 10 years, until his own death on March 8, 1935, Hachi returned daily to the train station awaiting the return of Ueno. Bronze statues of Hachi were erected, and a popular memorial service is held annually on March 8 at the train station. The loyal canine is also the subject of <i>Hachi: A Dog's Tale</i> (2009), a film starring Richard Gere .

Akitas were not common outside of Japan till [Helen Keller](#), a lady who was both blind and deaf, brought one to the USA in 1937, after puppy was presented to her as a gift during a tour of Japan. **NEVER gift a puppy to anyone, we have to say! It's an awful idea.** But back then such gifts were normal, and the Japanese revere these dogs, so they gave one to Helen as a mark of their respect for her. But they took a while to 'catch on' in

the States, and weren't admitted into the show classifications of the American Kennel Club (AKC) till 1973. Akitas were also imported into the UK in the 1930s and exhibited at Crufts by 1936. They became popular in the mid to late 1980s with the majority of imports being of the American type, but not seen an 'official breed' in the UK till some 40 years later.



[Helen Keller's akita](#)

But World War II was a terrible time for Akitas. Japan was on the opposite side to the US in the war, and American soldiers shot them for food and sport; though some soldiers befriended them and brought them

home with them after the war. The Japanese government had little choice, when the US navy cut off food supplies to the country, to also use them as food. Only dogs used in the military (usually German Shepherds) were exempt from the wholesale slaughter, and families desperate to save their pets gave them names usually given to Shepherd dogs, or hid them from the government dog collectors. After the war there were only three types of Akita left alive-

- **Matagi Akita** (the original hunting dogs) medium sized 'landrace' dogs



[1940s Matagi Akita- for a picture history of the OG Akita click here https://akita-inu.com/breed-history/](https://akita-inu.com/breed-history/)

• **‘Fighting Akitas’** (Matagi/Mastiff crosses)



1940s Fighting Akita

- **Shepherd Akitas** (where Akitas were bred with Shepherds in an attempt to make them exempt from the government culling. These were the ones mostly bought back to the US after the war.) It took about 40 years for this offshoot of the Akita to be crossbred with the original hunting type to deem them 'true to the original Akita' and as such accepted by the American Kennel Club. But this newer breed never ran as small as the

original Akitas, and ended up being called 'American Akitas'. The same happened in the UK, though breeder had both the Matagi and Shepherd types, the British Kennel Clubs called them both Akitas and were shown at events as such. Many UK breeders also crossbred these two types of Akita as well. By 2001 such crossbreeding was not allowed in Japan by the Japanese Kennel Club, the UK, US and Canada, the smaller ones being known as just Akitas, and the larger ones only being known as American Akitas outside off the UK. In the UK they are classified differently with the larger types being known as 'Akitas' and the smaller ones as 'Japanese Akita Inu' (Inu is Japanese for 'dog').



[1940s Shepherd Akita- for a history of how 'war dogs' Akitas developed click here https://shibasenji.wordpress.com/tag/war-dogs/](https://shibasenji.wordpress.com/tag/war-dogs/)

So for the UK the Akita 'proper' is only a newly accepted breed or breeds. The Japanese Akita Inu Club was created (and a good place to go for advice on the breed(s). Another good place for advice is the [Friends of Akitas Trust UK](#).) Both breeds got British Kennel Club certification in 2007. And they've been prize winners at dog shows ever since.



Best of Breed Akita Crufts 2022 - can you tell what type of Akita this is, being shown at Crufts? Check the size compared to their human!

However, Akitas are usually **working dogs**; or as we've said, **show dogs**; usually, and unless trained from pup and given a lot of outside engagement and stimulation, *would not do well in a small flat or house with no immediate outside space, so secure gardens only* for these boys and girls! **Do not expect instant recall abilities from Akitas** either- they can be stubborn, especially on the trail of a fascinating scent on a walk! So walk training in hired enclosed fields solo is probably the best way to walk train an Akita.

They are usually **very smart** and as a result **easily bored**. Just a job alone like 'sit' won't be enough- it is too 'easy' so they will need more complex sets of jobs like snuffle mats and other scenting tasks and more/linked harder jobs. They are often vocal like Huskies, they grumble at walk times and dinner times, and because they know their noises amuse their humans, so unless you have understanding neighbours, it's perhaps better to choose a quieter dog instead. And they get **comfort from carrying** things, even (gently) your hands or wrists! They can 'lead' you to what they want using this- to the treat cupboard or their lead hanging in the hall! This is not their fault: we bred them to be like this. While they have a reputation for being aloof for the right humans, they are **sensitive and loving**, sharing their silly and affectionate side with family and friends, but their sensitivity can also mean that they do not deal with **sudden changes** well. And, perhaps surprisingly, they do **not need 100 walks a day or walks that go on all day**, medium level activity- provided they get lots

of engagement between walks- is plenty to keep them active and healthy.



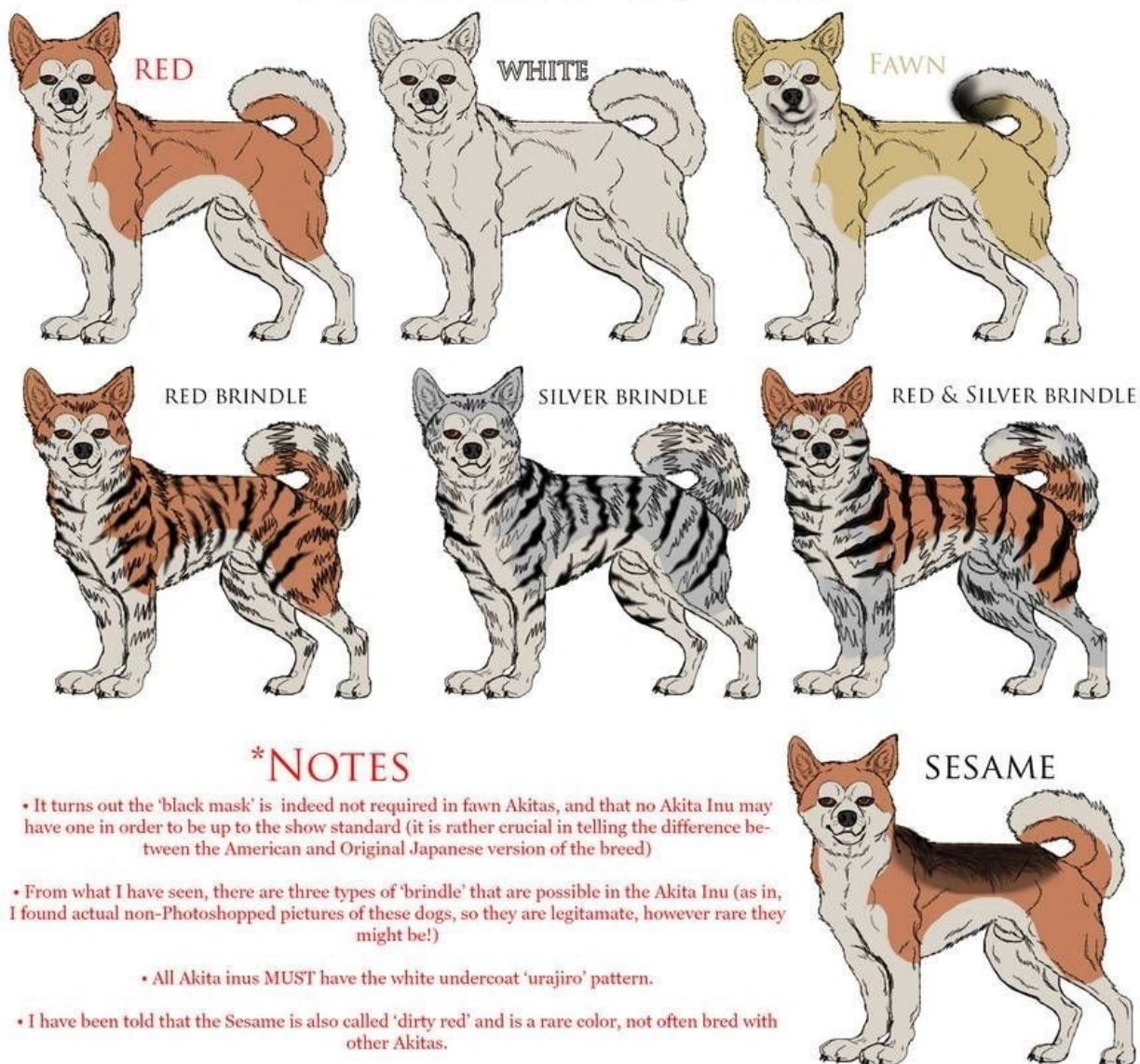
Akita on a walk

We as a rescue **do not adopt out any dogs as working dogs** unless you are officially qualified to train and keep working dogs (and can prove it), and will agree to them **sleeping in the house** (as they pine without their humans) with a bed and blankets, **engaged properly** in toy and treat training and play, be regularly **groomed**, and are **fed well**, not kept hungry. We never allow adoptions when the dogs are kept outside as guard dogs, on a **chain**. More rural homes or homes very close to woods or other places for exercise are usually better for such dogs unless adopted as a puppy.

Akitas are NOT dogs for anyone who has never had a dog before. They are a **powerful muscular dog** with a broad head, erect pointed small ears (so it's harder to use their ears to work out their state of mind- see our body language blog <https://lorasluck.org/blogs/f/what-is-my-dog-trying-to-tell-me>) , and a large curved tail carried over the back or curled against their back legs depending on what body language they are showing. They can be up to 28 inches (71 cm) tall to the shoulder (that means not including their heads) and can weigh 70 to 130 pounds (32 to 59 kg). So **NOT a dog to take on lightly**, you will need to be **strong enough to hold and control him** on walks. And while they can come with different colours and markings, including all-white, brindle, reddish, and pinto (distinct) white black and/or brown patches) all Akitas bear a distinct mask (dark brown/black area around the muzzle). And for most of the year grooming is fine a couple of times a week, and an occasional bath, when they shed twice a

year, daily brushing is a must. **Akitas are not a low maintenance dog.**

AKITA INU COLORS



*NOTES

- It turns out the 'black mask' is indeed not required in fawn Akitas, and that no Akita Inu may have one in order to be up to the show standard (it is rather crucial in telling the difference between the American and Original Japanese version of the breed)
- From what I have seen, there are three types of 'brindle' that are possible in the Akita Inu (as in, I found actual non-Photoshopped pictures of these dogs, so they are legitimate, however rare they might be!)
- All Akita inus **MUST** have the white undercoat 'urajiro' pattern.
- I have been told that the Sesame is also called 'dirty red' and is a rare color, not often bred with other Akitas.

Akita colour range

Now it is true that Akitas who find themselves in rescue are usually there because they are 'failed' guard or hunting dogs, they still have

the potential to protect their human packs. So meet and greets with other humans and dogs must be done **VERY CAREFULLY**, and usually homes with small furries like cats, hamsters, rabbits or guinea pigs may not be a good idea.

Like any 'pedigree' dog, Akitas are also prone to certain conditions: (need links to all of these)

- gastric dilation volvulus (GDV), a **bloating** condition that is potentially fatal and may require immediate (and often costly) veterinary intervention

- patellar luxation (dislocated **kneecap**)

- hypothyroidism or underachieve **thyroid**. The thyroid is the organ in charge of produce hormones that help regulate the body's metabolism- or how well their bodies change food to energy and fuel for the body. Symptoms can include a dry skin and coat, hair loss, susceptibility to other skin diseases, weight gain, or increased fearfulness or reactivity. **So ALWAYS take your dog to the vet if they're stressed all**

the time and don't put it down to his breed!

- Connected to that, can be **hip dysplasia**, (same as many larger pedigrees) Akita puppies should be fed a diet for large-breed puppies that **slows their rate of growth**. So no matter how much they tap their bowls, never overfeed a pup or young adolescent Akita!

- other **skin and allergy** issues especially if grooming is not done

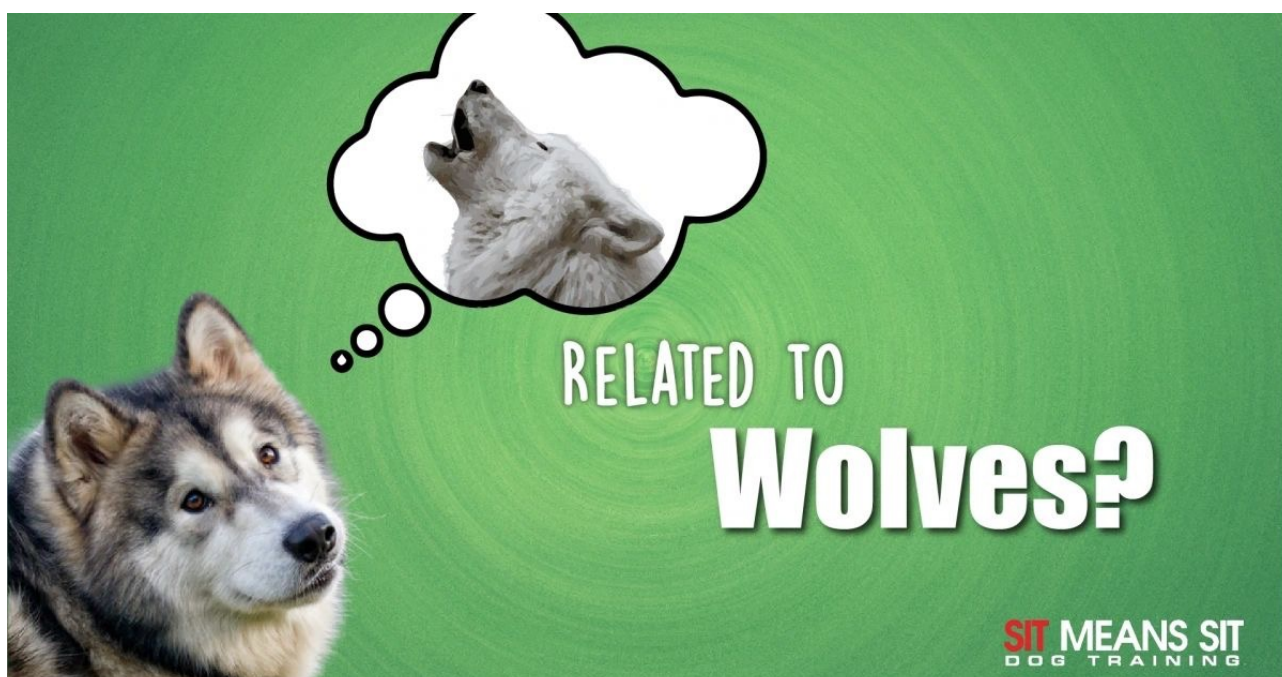
- **cancer** (especially Lymphomas-blood cancers, and Osteosarcoma- bone cancer)

- regular **eye** examinations in case they have progressive retinal atrophy and other serious eye conditions are also recommended.

For more on what Akitas can be prone to as a breed, [click here](#).

Be prepared for questions like “Is your dog a Husky mix? Or part Chow?” Lots of people are likely to meet your dog even from a distance, as they need an active household willing to take them everywhere on

adventures because they get so attached to their families! And for sure breeds like Huskies, Malamutes, Chow-Chows, Norwegian Elkhounds and others are distant cousins to Akitas. But never forget, Akitas are in fact closest ‘cousins’ to ancient **wolves**.



And sadly, because of their size, there is always talk of banning them under BSL (breed-specific legislation) rules, just like the XL Bully, Pit Bull, Japanese Tosa, Dogs Argentino and Fila Brasileiro already are.

Still think you've got what it takes to adopt an Akita? They like any dog are a responsibility for life. But add their size to the

mix and usual characters, and you may have to do some radical changing of routines to make sure your dog is healthy and happy.

FURTHER READING

<https://www.akc.org/dog-breeds/akita/#:~:text=Akitas%20are%20quiet%2C%20fast%20idiotic%20dogs,for%20protecting%20those%20they%20love.>

<https://akitarescue.org.uk/akita-history.html>

<https://akitas.org/the-akita-breed/akita-breed-history/#:~:text=Originally%2C%20the%20Akita's%20regional%20ancestors,to%20serve%20as%20hunting%20companions.>

<https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/looking-after-your-pet/puppies-dogs/large-dogs/akita#:~:text=While%20Akitas%20adapt%20well%20to,so%20attached%20to%20their%20families!>

<https://sitmeanssit.com/dog-training-mu/pueblo-dog-training/2106/dog-breeds-that-are-closely-related-to-wolves/#:~:text=Akita,are%20also%20excellent%20family%20dogs.>

Are Akitas good with kids? <https://theakitalife.com/are-akitas-good-with-kids/>