

## A Rose by Any Other Name: Coat and Color in the Anatolian Shepherd Dog

The Anatolian Shepherd Dog is a landrace of Livestock Guardian Dog that originates in Turkey. Shepherds in the region have been breeding sheep as a way of life for millennia, and they have utilized dogs to protect their livestock for nearly as long. Traditionally, the selection process for dogs has had more to do with working aptitude and suitability for the environment than anything else.

Turkey is slightly larger than Texas in area and it sits at the crossroads of Europe and Asia. The climate along its southwestern shorelines where it borders Greece and the Mediterranean Sea is temperate, but the climate of the interior and along its eastern borders with Syria, Iraq and Armenia is harsher and more extreme. Temperatures can range from hot, dry summers along the coasts to snowing and below zero in the winter in the mountains and along the eastern extremes of the country. Clearly, a working dog that originates in such a vast and varied environment will not be a “one size fits all” sort of dog, but rather will vary from one locale to another and be a dog best suited to working in its particular geographic region.

Sheep in Turkey, the animals that the Anatolian Shepherd Dog was originally tasked with guarding, come in a range of colors from white, to white with black faces, to those with wildly spotted coats. There is anecdotal evidence that suggests that dogs often matched the color and markings of the animals they were being used to guard, thus enabling the dog to blend in with the flock to a greater degree. When you look at the colors that the Anatolian Shepherd Dog commonly comes in – white, fawn with or without a black, blue or liver mask, pintos of the aforementioned colors, and brindle patterned dogs – you can see how this argument makes sense, and that there exists the possibility of a dog to match any color of sheep that you might run across.

Indeed, the AKC standard for the Anatolian states that “All color patterns and markings are equally acceptable”. It also states that the coat is “Short (one inch minimum, not tight) to Rough (approximately 4 inches in length) with neck hair slightly longer” and describes the heavier coat around the neck and the mane and thick undercoat that is common to both short and rough coated Anatolians.

The coat of an Anatolian Shepherd Dog is protective. It shields the dog from the elements and, along with the thicker skin on the dog’s neck, the heavier coat around the neck and mane of the dog helps to ensure that any animal attempting to bite the dog’s neck is going to end up with a mouthful of fur and skin rather than muscle and connective tissue. The protective qualities of the coat can be seen any time you attempt to bathe an Anatolian Shepherd Dog – getting the dog wet to the skin takes effort, and a couple of good shakes renders the dog damp-dry. Dig your fingers into the undercoat of an Anatolian Shepherd Dog in winter coat and you will find it difficult to get to the dog’s skin. This is the coat of a working animal – purely utilitarian and wonderfully designed by nature for its task.

While on the subject of coat and color it should be noted that aside from a bath, a nail trim, and a good brushing, the Anatolian Shepherd Dog requires no grooming. This a functional working breed and it should be presented in its natural state. This is a breed without artifice.

Coat and color in the Anatolian Shepherd Dog should always be secondary to breed type, structural soundness, and good temperament. The Anatolian Shepherd Dog is, first and foremost, a working Livestock Guardian Dog. This knowledge should be central to all judging decisions for the breed. Color, markings, and coat length, unless they are indicative of impure breeding, should always take a back seat to type, soundness and correct temperament for the breed. Remember, the coyote that is thinking of making a meal out of your livestock does not care one bit about the color or length of coat of the dog that is guarding the flock. All he cares about is having lunch without losing his life.

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