

So You Think You Want An Anatolian Shepherd Dog

Take your Anatolian Shepherd out for a walk and complete strangers will approach you wanting to know about the breed. I always tell them, "Anatolian Shepherds are from Turkey. You put them out with your sheep and goats and they keep the coyotes away."

That very brief description of what an Anatolian is and does, plus the calm, yet watchful, demeanor of the dogs, almost always has people convinced that they need one of their own. Say that here in Texas and people nod knowingly and say "I need a couple of them!". It doesn't matter if they live on a ranch and have a hundred head of stock for the dogs to guard or if they live in a mid-century ranch style home on a cul de sac and expect the dog to guard the kids, the goldfish, and the cat. Those of us who have ASD understand – the breed is amazing.

But let's be honest – there are some downsides to living with an Anatolian, and the public needs to be informed.

They're big – the standard calls for females from 27" and 80 pounds and males from 29" and 110 pounds and goes up from there. Yes, there are much larger breeds out there. We are accustomed to their size because we see it every day, but the average person thinks they're huge. Their size can make finding housing difficult if you don't own your own home.

They bark. Barking is the first line of defense for an Anatolian, right behind their imposing size. They stand up and allow the potential threat to see them, and then they bark – which is all fine and good if you live on a ranch and have the dog guarding sheep and goats. But it's a little less ok when they do that at 11pm on a weeknight in the ranch style on the cul de sac.

They shed – copiously, 24/7/365 and then twice a year it goes into overdrive. Along with barking, digging and size, shedding is one of the top complaints that people new to the breed have on social media. "How do I make them stop shedding?" is a common question.

They dig – if you were taken with the moon-landing as a child, then an Anatolian may be the breed for you! They love to dig craters in the yard and the pasture. Sometimes they even dig tunnels that go outside of the fence and onto the property next door. If you're into gardening and like having a nice yard then maybe you need to find another breed. Anatolians use the insulating properties of the earth to keep themselves cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

They need secure fencing - Good fences make good neighbors. Anatolians are generally respectful of fences, but there are individuals in the breed who are escape artists. I should know – I have one. Sometimes secure fencing entails the use of hotwire. Yet another reason they may not be the best breed for the subdivision where HOAs prescribe fencing options.

Anatolians are not dog friendly - They were bred to keep predators, including other dogs, away from stock. If you live in a subdivision, they aren't likely to make an exception for the neighbor's dog when it digs into your yard, or when out on a walk and a loose dog comes rushing up. This is not a dog park breed. There are exceptions to the rule, but in general, the breed is less than tolerant of strange dogs and dogs of the same sex.

Anatolians are smart – but they don't reliably perform on command. An Anatolian will learn things very quickly, but if what you're asking them to do does not have an immediate (for them) real-world application, chances are good they're not going to do it. They also tend to be more likely to comply with commands at home than away. So if performance is something that is important to you, there are far more performance oriented dogs in the Working group to choose from that will make you a much happier dog owner.

Given all this, you may be asking why anyone would want an Anatolian. Bear in mind the breed's purpose – guarding livestock. If you have a predator problem, there is no better life insurance policy for your animals than an Anatolian Shepherd Dog, and once you have lived with the breed in a working capacity, no other breed will do.

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