

ALBERTA SHEEP

Guardian Animals for Alberta

Guardian animals can be very effective along with other appropriate predation control methods. These animals are full-time members of the flock and require patience from livestock owners. Once a guardian animal is able to develop a bond with the livestock they will be able to reach their full protective potential.

Guard Dogs

The guardian dog is required to protect the flock and is not meant to herd it. A successful guardian dog is one of genetic quality with an emphasis on proper rearing. Once a puppy has been selected it should be raised among the flock to prevent biting ears, overplaying, and excessive wandering.

Quality Characteristics

- able to act independently
- must be attentive to sheep and not harm them
- physically sound and of good conformation
- alert, confident, intelligent

Selecting the Appropriate Breed

Dogs with a history of protecting livestock:

- Maremma (Italy)
- Shar Planietz (Yugoslavia)
- Anatolian shepherd (Turkey)
- Komondor (Hungary)
- Great Pyrenees (France and Spain)
- Akbash (Turkey)



How Many Dogs?

Experienced dogs may effectively patrol hundreds of sheep within several hundred acres. Younger dogs may not be able to guard as many sheep in such a large area.

Topography must also be considered brush, ravines and hills may be too much for one dog. Therefore, once the first dog is well established a second dog may be introduced. The established dog can become a role model for an untrained dog. Producers must also be aware of the problems that may arise from introducing more than one dog. If one of the dogs displays inappropriate behaviours, the second dog may also adopt these bad behaviours. The most common potential problems with multiple dogs include being aggressive or inattentive to the sheep.



The Socialization Process

- Optimum age is seven to eight weeks of age to begin the bonding process.
- The pup should be immediately placed with the sheep.
- The pup pen should be approximately 150 square feet.
- The pen should contain three to six sheep preferably lambs (orphans are ideal).
- Provide a retreat area that contains food and shelter for the pup not the lambs.
- Between four to six months of age, the puppy should be ready to assume the guardian role.

The rate of success among the breeds is not much different however there are behavioural differences. (**Note** the following table.) Komondors will usually bite people more than the Great Pyrenees, Akbash, or Anatolians, and fewer Great Pyrenees injure livestock than do Komondors, Akbash or Anatolians.

Sheep producers must remember that there is no guarantee a dog will be successful merely because it is of its breed or bloodline. Sheep producers should purchase a well-recognized guarding dog from a reputable breeder.

Benefits and Problems (percent)

Breed	Number of Dogs	Effectiveness			Economics			Stays with Sheep			Aggressive to		Dog Injures		Other Problems		
		Very	Somewhat	Not	Asset	Breakeven	Liability	Mostly	Usually	Rarely	Predators	Dogs	Sheep	People	None	Minor	Major
Great Pyrenees	437	71	22	7	83	11	6	53	24	23	95	67	7	4	42	47	11
Komondor	138	69	1	12	82	8	10	50	23	27	94	77	24	17	38	48	14
Akbash	62	69	22	9	71	12	12	71	12	17	100	92	20	6	36	49	15
Anatolian	56	77	13	10	82	8	10	69	16	15	96	86	14	9	42	48	10
Maremma	20	70	20	10	84	5	11	79	16	5	94	94	20	5	58	24	18
Shar	11	40	30	30	50	0	50	30	20	50	88	89	33	25	40	40	20
Kuvasz	7	57	29	14	80	0	20	33	33	34	100	67	40	0	0	86	14
Hybrid	23	87	4	9	84	5	11	70	13	17	95	85	18	0	43	38	19
Other	9	43	29	28	20	20	60	33	17	50	83	100	43	29	17	50	33
Total	753	71	21	8	82	9	9	55	22	22	95	74	14	7	41	46	13

*Summary of 1986 survey characterizing livestock guarding dogs.

Guard Donkeys

Donkeys instinctively dislike dogs and will bray, bare teeth, chase, kick, bite and trample dogs or coyotes.

Factors to Consider when Selecting a Donkey

- Use a jenny (jenny with foal is most protective) or gelded jack (intact jacks are normally aggressive and may injure livestock).
- Use one donkey per livestock group (donkey may bond with another donkey or horse and not with the sheep).
- Allow 4 to 6 week for the donkey to bond prior to the onset of predation.
- Donkeys are most effective within smaller, open pastures.
- There is a limited number of sheep that a donkey can guard.
- Remove donkey from flock during lambing season to prevent accidental or intentional injuries to lambs
- Advantage of the donkey over the guard dog is that they can eat the same food as the sheep so they don't have to be fed separately and will bed down with the sheep at night.
- Do not feed donkey feeds that contain **Rumensin** or other additives intended for ruminants
- It is ideal if the donkey can be raised with sheep and at weaning left alone to live with them.
- If the donkey has not been raised with the sheep, pen next to sheep for an adaptation period. Feed the donkey with the sheep and at the end of a week or ten days he can be safely turned out with the flock.
- Standard donkeys are preferred as miniature donkeys are too small.
- Purchase a donkey with good conformation and attitude.
- Try to purchase from a reputable donkey breeder.
- Donkeys may think lambs are intruders, therefore pen the donkey away from the ewes until the lambs are well-bonded to their mothers and are steady on their feet.
- Donkeys should have their hooves trimmed every six weeks to two months (may need a competent farrier).



Enjoy and look after your donkey and it will look after your flock.

Llamas

Mature llamas are known to strike out at predators and do their best to protect sheep.

Factors to Consider when Selecting a Llama

- No training or raising of baby llamas with sheep is necessary to be effective in guarding sheep (innate behaviour).
- It is important that a new llama be in with the ewes prior to lambing. Llamas have a special attraction to lambs, which makes them good sheep guards.
- Both male and female llamas will naturally guard against predators. Geldings are used most often because there are more male llamas who are not used in breeding programs. Male llamas are usually castrated because they may try to breed ewes in the flock and injure them. Only one gelding per flock should be used.
- Llamas have a life expectancy of 20 to 30 years.
- Llamas do not begin guarding until they are about two years of age or older.
- Fibre will require some maintenance like grooming and shearing yearly or biyearly.
- The guard llama will still need to be vaccinated dewormed and have its nails trimmed.
- When purchasing a guard llama get contracts which will offer some compensation or replacement if the llama does not guard properly

