

FOR LOVE OF LIVESTOCK



# A Step-By-Step Guide

---

Training Livestock Guardian  
Dogs to Chickens

# Training Livestock Guardian Dogs to Chickens: A Step-by-Step Guide

---



I first became interested in livestock guardian dogs because I was worried about my chickens. I love my chickens. I want them to live the best lives possible, which to me means free ranging. I want them to have the freedom to do what they want to do and to go where they want to go. But how could I still keep them safe? For me, livestock guardian dogs (LGDs) were the perfect answer.

Can livestock guardian dogs protect chickens and other poultry? Yes, most livestock guardian dogs from working lines can protect chickens and other poultry. However, these dogs will need additional training to achieve this goal.

In this article, I cover why livestock guardian dogs need additional training to guard chickens, how to do this training, and the problems you might encounter.

## Livestock Guardian Dogs and Chickens: A Not So Natural Match

Below is a table that shows you the most common LGD breeds and which types of livestock they historically protected.

Breed	Cattle	Goats	Sheep	Other
Akbash		X	X	
Anatolian Shepherd		X	X	
Armenian Gampr	X	X	X	
Carpathian Shepherd			X	
Caucasian Ovcharka		X	X	

Breed	Cattle	Goats	Sheep	Other
Central Asian Shepherd		X	X	Camels
Estrela Mountain Dog		X	X	
Great Pyrenees			X	
Kangal		X	X	
Karakachan			X	
Komondor			X	
Kuvasz			X	
Maremma Sheepdog		X	X	
Polish Tatra Sheepdog			X	
Pyrenean Mastiff			X	
Sarplaninac			X	
Slovensky Cuvac	X	X	X	Other livestock, including poultry
Spanish Mastiff	X		X	
Tibetan Mastiff	Yaks	X	X	Horses
Tornjak			X	

Notice any particular type of livestock that's missing? Could it be the most common livestock animal in the United States today? That's right, the chicken. Okay, so chickens aren't missing from the chart completely. The Slovensky Cuvac breed, rare in the United States, has been traditionally used as an all-around guardian dog, including as a guardian of poultry. But the other breeds... not so much.

Does this matter? Yes, it definitely does. LGDs have been bred to protect mammals, and one of the main reasons they do this job so well is because they have bonded with the mammals. From a behavioral stance, chickens are *very different* from mammals in a lot of ways.

Chickens can and do bond with individuals of different species. They too are social creatures. I have bonded closely with many of my chickens myself. However, they display different bonding behaviors than mammals do, and your dogs probably aren't going to understand them. Most chicken raisers don't even understand them.

Chickens largely bond through the activities they do together, including dust bathing, scratching and pecking at the ground side-by-side, perching together, talking to each other, etc. All of these behaviors are foreign to your livestock guardian dogs.

Does this mean it's impossible for your LGDs to bond with your chickens? No, definitely not, but it does mean that most LGDs won't bond with them the same way they bond with other animals. Often, your best bet at protection is to train your dogs to ignore your chickens. Your dogs, then, will protect your chickens as they protect their territory. They will want to keep predators out and away from their territory, including away from the farm chickens.

You may find that your LGDs actually do bond with your chickens and form relationships with them. Count yourself lucky and take some pictures of their adorable interactions. Otherwise, training your dogs to ignore your chickens will keep your birds just as safe.



### **Can All Livestock Guardian Dogs Be Trained to Chickens?**

I'm never comfortable making all or none statements as there can always be exceptions, but generally, speaking, yes, if these conditions are met:

1. LGDs come from a working line – if your LGDs don't come from a good working line, you never know what you're getting. Additionally, many working line LGD breeders expose their puppies to poultry regularly before they sell them. Non-working line LGDs may be harder to train to chickens, but many will still be trainable. See the adorable video below of a young Spanish Mastiff puppy from a working line getting to know a rooster through the fence.
2. You have the knowledge, time, and patience to train your LGDs – this is by far the most important condition for your dogs' success. I don't say this to be harsh, but more often than not, your dogs' training failures are actually your training failures. For more on specifics about how to train LGDs, see my LGD Ultimate Training Guide and my Step-by-Step LGD Training Manual.

<https://youtu.be/peQMctYv1zY?t=20>

### **How Long Does It Take to Train Livestock Guardian Dogs to Chickens?**

Assuming you are patient, consistent, and using positive training methods, training your LGDs to chickens will likely take weeks or months. Some of you may be lucky and end up with natural guardians that need little to no training, but don't count on it.

## When Should You Start Training Your Livestock Guardian Puppies to Chickens?

You can start introducing your puppies to chickens as soon as they are comfortable enough to walk around the farm with you.

## How to Train Livestock Guardian Dogs to Chickens Step-by-Step

You absolutely will want to train your livestock guardian dogs to chickens using only positive methods. These methods are the most effective, and ensure happy, healthy dogs with strong bonds to you. For more information on how to train your dogs using positive methods, see my [LGD Ultimate Training Guide](#) and my [Step-by-Step LGD Training Manual](#).

### Step 1 – Control the Training Environment

Just like with obedience training, there are a number of environmental things you'll want to control when training your LGDs to chickens. Controlling these things will greatly increase your dogs' chances of success and will speed up your training process (not to mention, help to preserve your sanity). These things are:

1. **Make sure your dogs have had exercise first** – you don't want to introduce untrained dogs who are excited and energetic to chickens. You want your dogs to be calm and in a state of mind in which they are open to training.
2. **Make sure you are introducing your dogs to chickens in a calm area during a calm time** – basically, you don't want your dogs to have any stimulating distractions or anything that may get them excited or otherwise worked up.
3. **Make training pleasurable** – you want your dogs to have positive associations with training and with being around chickens.
4. **Be prepared to reward your dogs** – if you're using treats or tug toys, make sure to have them on hand.

For more detailed information on each of the factors above, check out my article, [Training Livestock Guardian Dogs: The Ultimate Guide](#).

### Step 2 – Learn How to Obedience Train Your LGDs with Positive Methods

Learn how to obedience train your dogs. I don't mean that they have to be well trained before you introduce them to chickens, definitely not. What I mean is that you need to learn how to do obedience training sessions so that you can practice these sessions around your chickens. Obedience training sessions are the best way to distract your dogs from chickens. Obedience training and livestock training go hand in hand – you can work on both at the same time.

I teach how to obedience train livestock guardian dogs in my [LGD Ultimate Training Guide article](#), and I give step-by-step instructions for teaching every important command in my [LGD Training Manual](#). If you don't know how to obedience train your dogs, these two free resources will be super helpful.

### **Step 3 - Introduce Your LGDs to Your Chickens Slowly**

Training sessions with chickens should initially be very short, no more than 10-15 minutes, perhaps even just 5 minutes. Train at least once a day. Multiple training sessions per day will result in faster training as long as your dogs are in the mood for training.

The easiest way to train your dogs to your chickens is to prevent something bad from happening. You want to start by preventing them from chasing, barking, or attempting to play with the chickens, for example. In order to do this, you will need to distract your dogs from the chickens and then reward them for calm behavior. Reward them for ignoring the chickens.

If your chickens are confined, first introduce your dogs to your chickens through the fence. Keep your dogs on leashes. If your dogs get excited when they see the chickens, you will need to move them as far away from the chickens as you need to for them to be calm. Do a training session where they are calm (and of course reward the training). The training session can include any commands you are working on (ex. Sit, stay, down, look at me, etc.).

Then move the dogs slightly closer to the chickens and do another training session. Move them closer and repeat. As soon as they start to look at the chickens, do a training session immediately to distract them. You are trying to prevent them from reacting to the chickens. Back away from the chickens a little if you need to do so to keep your dogs calm.

If your dogs get excited by the chickens and react with unwanted behavior, back away again until you are far enough away you can distract them with a training session. You will eventually be able to get closer and closer to the chickens as time goes on.

Always end on a positive note. If your dogs react to the chickens in a way that is not acceptable, move them away until you can distract them with a training session and end with that session.

Eventually you will be able to enter the chicken run with your dogs on leash. Continue practicing this way in the run with training sessions and rewarding calm behavior.

If your chickens are not confined (truly free range), then don't approach them initially as you would do if they were behind a fence. Start your training sessions with your dogs far away. Get a little closer, do a training session. Get a little closer, do a training session. Get a little closer... you get the picture. When you're too close (i.e., your dogs can no longer be distracted from the chickens and are reacting to them with unwanted behavior), back off as described above.



Do not ever scold or punish your dogs in any way. No shaming and no time outs. Your dogs are learning something new, and like humans, they have to learn at their own speeds. It's neither kind nor fair to punish them for not learning as quickly as you want them to. Imagine if you were trying to learn something new and you were punished because you couldn't do it fast enough. The speed at which your dogs are learning is not up to them. It takes as long as it takes.

If your dogs react to the chickens with unwanted behavior, then you have reached their limit for that moment in time. Either that vicinity to the chickens is their boundary and they can't control themselves beyond it, or they are too tired for further training. Either way, know that with consistent training, that boundary will tighten and disappear altogether and a tired dog will no longer be a reactive dog. Patience and consistency should be your mantra.

#### **Step 4: Spend Time with Your LGDs Around the Chickens**

When your dogs get to the point that they are no longer reacting to the chickens on leash, you can spend time sitting with your LGDs with the chickens. If your dogs are behaving calmly, reward them. This teaches them that this is the behavior they should have around the chickens. You want them to associate the chickens with calmness.

When your dogs are ready, replace their short leashes with long leads so that they can move more freely around the chickens, but you can still have some control over their movement if needed.

If you see one of your dogs staring at a chicken or see his body tensing up like he may bark or chase a chicken, prevent the behavior by distracting him with a training session. Sometimes a "leave it" or a "look at me" command is enough to break his fixation. If he follows the command, reward him. Continue as needed.

When your dogs are first learning, you should reward them a lot for their calm behavior. As they get more used to the chickens, you won't need to keep rewarding them as much. But when in doubt, reward, reward, reward.

If you are unable to prevent your dogs from reacting, move them far enough away from the chickens that you can distract them with a training session. Either try to approach the chickens again with the techniques in Step 3, or call it a day.

You also can give your dogs bones or something fun to chew on during these times with the chickens. This also helps to teach them that being calm around chickens is a good thing. They get to just lay there with their delicious bones.

After you have had many sessions sitting with your dogs and chickens during which your dogs have not reacted at all, you can let go of their leads completely. Again, use a long lead here so that if a dog does go after a chicken, it's easy for you to jump on the lead and stop him. Also make sure your dogs are wearing harnesses and not collars. You don't want to jump on a lead attached only to a collar as this will cause your dog pain.

Ultimately, you will be able to remove the leads altogether, but be sure you feel very confident that your dogs are not going to attack the chickens and that they will listen to your commands.

**Remember, it may take weeks or months to get to this place in your training. Don't get discouraged. This is normal.**

### **Step 5: Leave Your Dogs Alone with the Chickens**

This is the very last step, leaving your dogs alone with your chickens. You will first want to stay in the vicinity with your eyes on your dogs at all times so that you can quickly intervene if necessary.

Once your dogs become pros at behaving calmly while you are no longer with them but still in the vicinity, spend some time out of sight of your dogs. You want to still be able to see them while they can't see you. Find a spot where you can see them through a window, or peak around the side of a building or bushes. You need to make sure that they are staying calm with your poultry even when they think you are nowhere around.

You will know when your dogs can be trusted alone with your chickens. If you still have doubts or feel worried, it's too soon. Continue with training.

## **Problems When Training Livestock Guardian Dogs to Chickens**

### **Aggressive Chickens and LGDs**

Don't let chickens be aggressive to your dogs. The only time it is okay for a chicken to be aggressive is in self-defense or as a warning. If your dog approaches a hen in an egg box, for example, and she pecks him, this is totally acceptable behavior. She is setting a boundary for her personal space. The same is true for a hen who doesn't want a dog approaching her chicks.

If hens or roosters attack your puppies without provocation, don't allow this. Step in. If you have feisty roosters, don't allow them to get close. This is not 'pecking order' stuff (which is largely a myth) – this is bullying. It's frightening for the puppies and they will associate bad feelings with chickens. You never want your dogs to be afraid of their charges or to view them as adversaries.

### **When Your LGD Hurts a Chicken**



One of the worst myths about livestock guardian dogs out there is that if they kill or injure a chicken, they are “ruined” as poultry guardians. Not true, not true, not true!

If your dog kills or hurts a chicken, you didn’t properly train him. This is on you, not your dog. But you can fix it.

Because many people don’t know how to properly train their LGDs to chickens, this scenario is unfortunately very common. But if people take the time to learn how to train their dogs, their dogs can still turn out to be excellent guardians.

One woman commented in an LGD Facebook group that her dog killed 15 chickens before he was properly trained, and now he’s a perfect guardian. She also said she was the third home for her second LGD, a notorious chicken killer. This dog, too, is now completely reformed and makes an excellent guardian. She posted an adorable picture of one her dogs with his ‘boyfriend,’ a duck. This dog had killed ducks before training and now he’s bonded to them.

You can do this. Your dogs aren’t “ruined.” They just need more help and a little understanding. Start from the beginning with training and don’t give up.

### **Introducing New Chickens or Other Poultry**

You will have to train your dogs to any new poultry you bring in. Don’t forget this step. It may be obvious to you that your dogs should protect the new poultry, same as he does the old, but it’s not obvious to your dogs.

My neighbors’ Great Pyrenees, Shaggy, was an excellent guardian of chickens and turkeys. He protected their flocks and mine also. My neighbors then added some ducks to their flock. They didn’t bother to train Shaggy to them because they assumed he’d be fine: he wasn’t a poultry killer. Well, he killed them all immediately. You need to teach your dogs new animals are their charges too.

### **Livestock Guardian Dogs and Chicks**

Many people have found that their livestock guardian dogs who dutifully protect their chickens may kill chicks. Chicks look very different from chickens and your LGDs may view them as intruders. You need to train your dogs to these chicks.

Additionally, your LGDs may accidentally kill chicks because they are curious about them. I’ve seen more than one anecdote where people’s dogs simply put a paw on a chick to get a better look, which then results in serious injury to or death of the chicks. You will need to quell your dogs’ curiosities about chicks. Introduce your dogs to the chicks and then train them to ignore them.

## **Livestock Guardian Dogs and Poultry Predators**

As you navigate through the possibly frustrating realm of training your LGDs to chickens, just remember that this effort is totally worth it. Most people who have LGDs guarding poultry don't have a single loss. I hear this over and over again.

Remember my neighbors' Great Pyrenees, Shaggy, the duck killer? Well, before these neighbors had Shaggy, they decided to free range their flock. They quickly lost every single one of their chickens to predators. Every. Single. One.

After they brought Shaggy home and started a new flock, they went an entire year without losing a chicken. Then they lost one (and only one) chicken to a coyote. They said the next morning, Shaggy ran up to them with a coyote leg in his mouth. When they went down to the coop, they said it looked like a coyote had exploded.

These dogs do what it takes to protect your flocks. Though the training may be time consuming and frustrating at times, your efforts will pay off many times over, and, most importantly, your chickens will thank you for it.

### **You May Also Be Interested in:**

**[Brain Training for Dogs: The Best Online Obedience Training Program for Livestock Guardian Dogs](#)**

**[The Ultimate Obedience Training Program for Pet Livestock Guardian Dog Breeds: Brain Training for Dogs](#)**

**[Training Livestock Guardian Dogs: The Ultimate Guide](#)**

**[Livestock Guardian Dogs and Barking: Some Breeds Bark Less Than Others](#)**

**[Livestock Guardian Dogs and Roaming: Which Breeds Roam, Why, and How to Fix Roaming Problems](#)**

FOR LOVE OF LIVESTOCK



# A Step-By-Step Guide

---

Training Livestock Guardian  
Dogs to Chickens