

# 11 Dog Breeds That Capture the American Spirit

These 11 breeds are as American as apple pie, yet many have colorful histories regarding their roots. After all, American dogs had to evolve from other breeds, right? How many of these fascinating breeds can you recognize?

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are many wonderful dog breeds in the world, but this list includes dogs who are as American as apple pie
- Emigrants to the U.S. in the 1800s and 1900s often brought purebred dogs with them, which were developed into distinctly American breeds
- From “ratting” terriers to retrievers to sled dogs, America has its own unique breeds that have made names for themselves in canine registries and clubs
- Experts believe today's American Water Spaniel, known to have been brought to America in the 19th century, is a direct descendant of the English version, which is now extinct
- A farm dog with a sled dog background, the rare Chinook also has a fascinating history

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There are so many wonderful dog breeds in the world. In the U.S., many of them are imported, such as the French bulldog, Bernese mountain dogs from the Swiss Alps, Chihuahuas from Mexico and the Chow Chow, which comes from China.

But some of the finest dogs on the planet are from the good old U.S. of A. Sometimes their names offer a hint to their solidly American origins. The 11 breeds that follow are among the most popular, in no particular order.

### 1. **Rat Terrier**



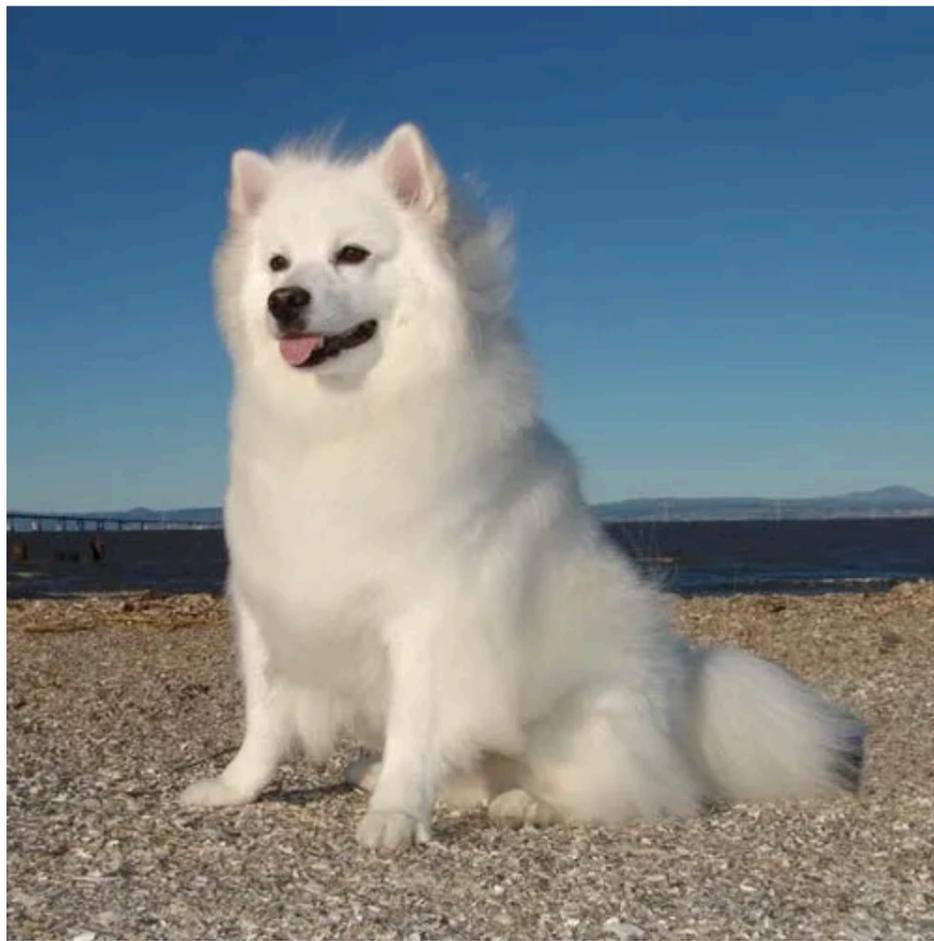
This pup's rather inglorious name (aka rapping terrier) indicates the function for which it was bred. American farmers needed a rat catcher; that particular skill set was obtained from his forebears, which include the English-born Whippet and the Italian bloodhound, both known for being quick.

Rather than having a similar aristocratic bearing, rat terriers are shorter and more compact because they also have some beagle stock in their background, brought about by breeders' need for a good sniffer with a pack mentality.

A very close relative is called the Teddy Roosevelt terrier, after the erstwhile president. Ironically, Roosevelt is attributed with naming the rat terrier breed after Scamp, his favorite canine pal who purportedly was able to rid the White House of a rat infestation.<sup>1</sup>

Besides a prevalence for skin allergies and a skin disease called demodectic mange, particularly among young toy and miniature rat terriers, other health conditions to be aware of include epilepsy and heart disease, hypothyroidism and hernias.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. **American Eskimo Dog**



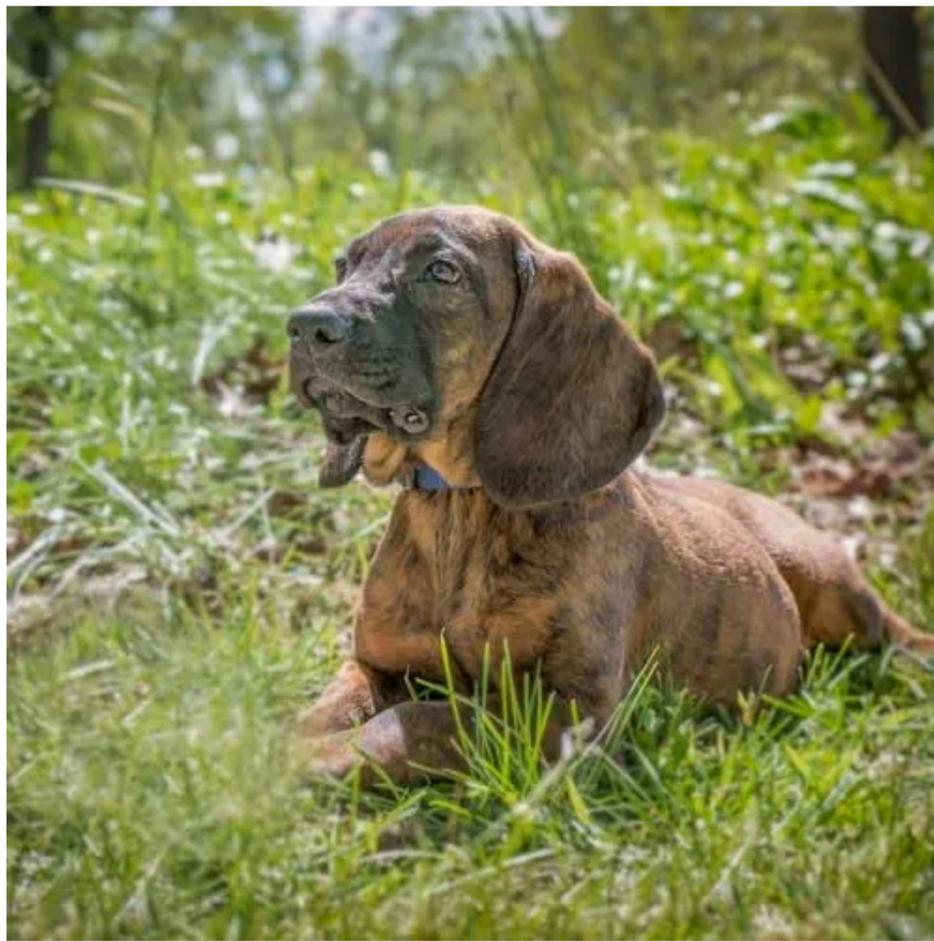
Beautifully white and fluffy, this dog's looks, rather than his origin, indicate why he was given the name, because the breed originated in the U.S. by German immigrants from such Nordic breeds as the white Pomeranian, white German spitz and the Volpino Italiano, another spitz breed with a white coat.

First known as the American spitz, he was christened the American Eskimo Dog in 1917. Besides this dog's feather-soft white fur, other traits include a playful nature and a deserved reputation as being a great watchdog.

While they're good with children, their rambunctiousness requires a watchful eye with smaller ones. Cataracts and other eye disorders constitute one health alert among this breed. Another is Legg-Calve-Perthes Disease.

This genetic condition, characterized by spontaneous collapse of the femur, is both painful and can be debilitating, even for pups as young as 4 months old. However, Dogtime notes that surgery can result in a "pain-free puppy."<sup>3</sup>

### 3. **Plott Hound**



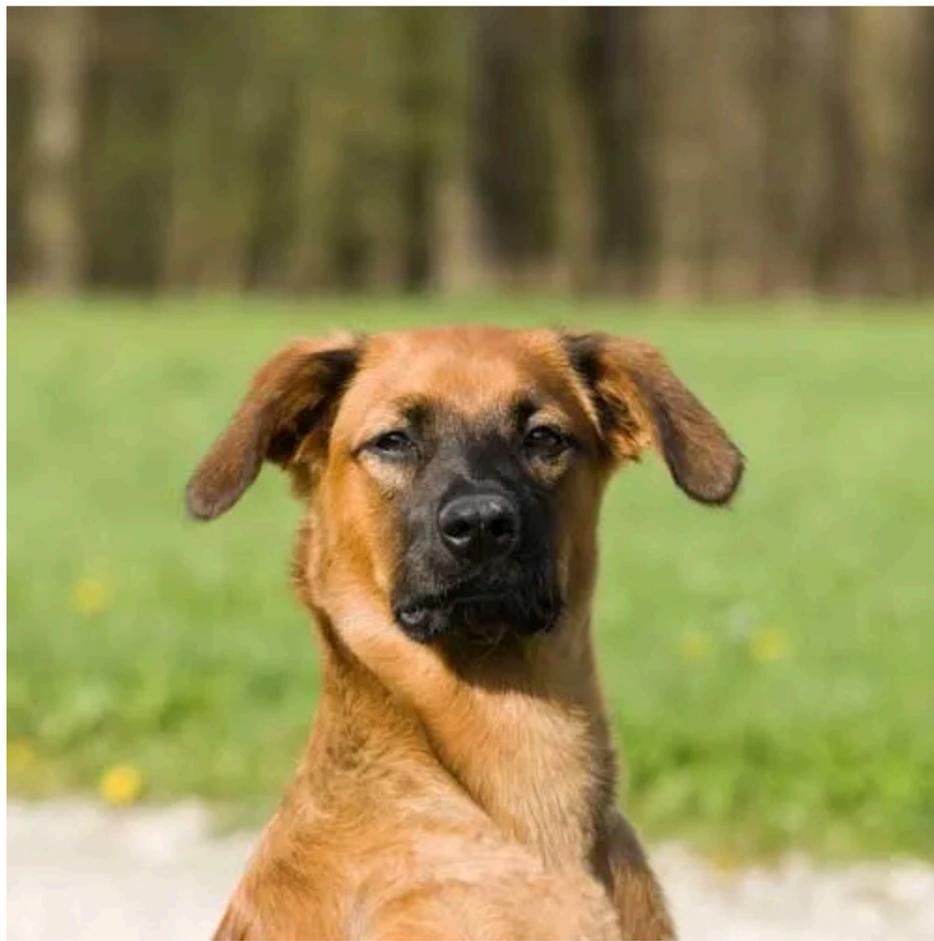
The Appalachian, Blue Ridge and Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina are where this attractive dog got his start. The state's official canine, the Plott hound is the only breed that doesn't have direct lineage from England.

The history is quite interesting: when Europeans were migrating to the States in the mid-1700s, one with the surname Plott brought five Hanoverian dogs.

Never being crossed with other breeds, the dogs' descendants were renowned for their stamina, courage and attentive hunting skills, according to Appalachian History.<sup>4</sup>

Plott hound coloring includes red, black and buckskin, as well as many interesting combinations. Although they have few health concerns, their deep chests make them prone to bloat with gastric torsion, a malady Plott breeders call "twisted gut." You may also find rare instances of hip dysplasia.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4. **Chinook**



A farm dog with a sled dog background, the rare Chinook also has a fascinating history, not the least of which includes this breed's forebears who were the first to scale Mount Washington in New Hampshire. The lead dog, fittingly named Chinook, came from a Husky and a Mastiff/St. Bernard cross. According to Chinook.org:

*"Chinook had the intelligence, power, endurance, speed and friendly nature that [Arthur] Walden [who created the breed] was trying to develop in a sled dog. He was a great lead dog, but was also known for his gentle disposition toward children."<sup>6</sup>*

American explorer Richard E. Byrd's 1929 Antarctic expedition was another feat by this able dog. From him, more than 400 purebred Chinooks are registered with the United Kennel Club (U.K.C.). Generally a healthy breed, in rare cases these dogs are diagnosed with hip dysplasia, mono/bilateral cryptorchidism (aka undescended testicles), seizures and spondylosis.<sup>7</sup>

## 5. **American Water Spaniel**



Experts believe today's American Water Spaniel, known to have been brought to America in the 19th century, is a direct descendant of the English version, which is now extinct. Developed in the Fox River Valley region of Wisconsin, this dog with a curly, dark brown coat and floppy ears is the state mascot.

A natural water lover, this breed is a skilled hunter and retriever but also a great family dog. Eager to please and occasionally timid, they're also energetic and fun loving. Abnormal formation of the hip socket, called canine hip dysplasia or CHD, can be a rare factor in the health of this dog, as can lenticular opacities, which occasionally affects their eyesight.<sup>8</sup>

## 6. **Boston Terrier**



"American Gentleman" is the perfect name for this perky pup, whom breeders deduce was likely a cross between a white English terrier and a bulldog. This pug-faced canine is a wonderful companion dog, but his facial structure may cause a breathing obstruction, with difficulties evidenced by frequent snuffling or

snorting.

Allergic dermatitis is one of the most common physical problems with Boston terriers, which may necessitate allergy testing, special shampoo and lotion and possibly a custom diet. Mites might be another problem, which are especially annoying because they spread from dog to dog.<sup>9</sup>

## 7. **Alaskan Malamute**



One of the oldest known breeds, the ancestors of these dogs were indeed Alaskan, as the name indicates. Inuit Eskimos got around using sleds and these dogs for transport, which is why they're built with such powerful frames. Ancestors include the Finnish Spitz, Norwegian elkhound, Siberian husky and the Chow Chow.

As you might imagine, Alaskan Malamutes require regular exercise. They're smart and trainable, but their headstrong nature manifests itself at a young age, so early training is advised. They're avid diggers. Hip dysplasia is prevalent in this breed, and they may also have a condition known as polyneuropathy, a disease of the nervous system identified by weakness and lack of coordination. Also, as Vetstreet notes:

*"Malamutes can also be affected by chondrodysplasia, a developmental abnormality of the cartilage that can lead to dwarfism. Breeders should be able to show Alaskan Malamute Club of America certification that at least one of a puppy's parents was free of this condition."<sup>10</sup>*

## 8. **Chesapeake Bay Retriever**



Not many breeds have a history this dramatic: two Newfoundland dogs were rescued after a British ship crashed off the Maryland coast in 1807. As they displayed retrieving skills, they were bred to local dogs, possibly flat-coated or curly-coated retrievers, beginning an American variety with the hunting tenacity of his forebears.

Chessies are assertive and confident, especially as duck hunters. At home, they need plenty of exercise. Early training is recommended for a general willful streak, but they're quick learners.

Again, hip dysplasia is the most prevalent health condition to watch for. An eye disorder known as progressive retinal atrophy means possible vision loss in this breed, along with other eye problems. Hypothyroidism, as well as degenerative myelopathy, a disease in the spinal cord, may emerge in older dogs.<sup>11</sup>

## 9. **Toy Fox Terrier**



Energetic and clever, this little spitfire is like his larger "ratting" cousin in that she's a natural-born vermin hunter. She's mighty quick to catch her prey, which came in handy for American farmers, where she first became a noted breed in 1936.<sup>12</sup>

Predecessors include the Chihuahua, as well as the Manchester and smooth fox terrier breeds. Congenital hypothyroidism is one of the health conditions to watch for, along with a possible goiter. A DNA test can detect this condition as early as 2 weeks of age.

Luxating patellas, or displaced kneecaps, is another health condition to watch for. Willebrand's disease, another malady, can trigger life-threatening blood loss, and an eye problem known as lens luxation causes a dog's eye to slip from its socket.<sup>13</sup>

#### 10. **American Staffordshire Terrier/American Pit Bull Terrier**

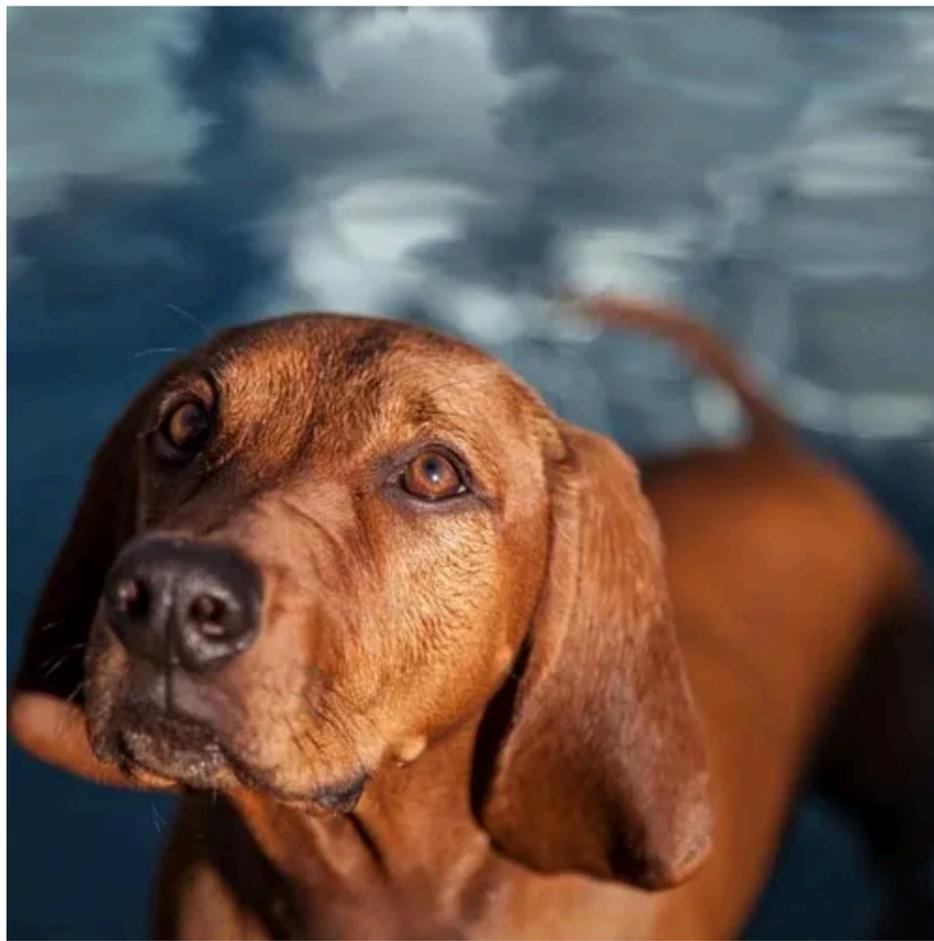


Strength, agility and natural smarts make this breed a great candidate for obedience and agility training. Their history involves crossing with bulldogs, which is evident in photos from the 19th century, but American breeders developed a heavier dog than the British variety.

These two breeds, referred to as "pit bulls," were popular for dog fights for the wealthy and unscrupulous, but were just as desirable for their ability in eradicating small pests on farms. The "Amstaff" is known for being aggressive, courageous, playful and protective, while the "Pitty" is affectionate, alert, loyal and friendly. Both excel at physical activities, as Pet Breeds notes.<sup>14</sup>

These dogs' physical characteristics as well as their activities may come into play regarding their general health. While both are quite hardy, pit bulls of both persuasions may be prone to hip dysplasia, kneecap dislocation tendencies and degenerative myelopathy. His short hair can contribute to skin conditions. Heart and thyroid issues may also be present.<sup>15</sup>

#### 11. **Redbone Coonhound**



If a drowsy dog draped over the edge of a Southern front porch comes to mind with mention of this dog, you're spot on. This pup's red coloring is one of his hallmarks; ironic because his ancestors came with Scottish and Irish settlers in America.

Laidback and easily adapted to nearly any household, this breed can get along well with other dogs, cats and people, but they're avid squirrel and raccoon chasers, so providing a place to run freely is one of the best things you can do for them. Health concerns are few, fortunately. Occasionally, hip dysplasia may be a problem. Progressive retinal atrophy has also been reported.<sup>16</sup>

## Sources and References

[Vetstreet, June 26, 2012](#)

<sup>1, 3</sup> [Dogtime 2016](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Dogster, February 26, 2025](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Appalachian History January 12, 2006](#)

<sup>5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16</sup> [VetStreet, July 7, 2011 \(Archived\)](#).

<sup>6</sup> [Chinook 2009-2015 \(Archived\)](#).

<sup>7</sup> [Dog Breed Info 1998-2016](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Animal Planet 2016 \(Archived\)](#).

<sup>9</sup> [Boston Terrier Forums 2002-2012](#)

<sup>14</sup> [PetBreeds 2016 \(Archived\)](#).

<sup>15</sup> [PetMD, November 11, 2025](#)

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