

Genetic Testing for Dogs' Coat Colors, Patterns

Testing is now available for five dog breeds to assess if they carry any hidden colors in their genetic makeup.

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At times, dog color and coat patterns seem to be somewhat of a mystery when puppies are born with markings different from their parents. Now, genetic tests are available for several breeds to determine if dogs carry recessive genes for certain colors.

The research of Shelia Schmutz and T.G. Berryere was published in the December 2007 issue of "Animal Genetics," and identifies the seven genes that cause color and pattern differences in dogs' coats. The American Kennel Club Canine Health Foundation helped fund the study.

The genetic tests are expected to be used by dog breeders who wish to select for or against certain colors, however the research may have broader implications. In addition to assessing colors and patterns, the research could shed light on genetic diseases intertwined with certain dog breeds.

Genetic testing is currently available for Briards, Japanese Chins, English Setters, Miniature Schnauzers, and Pugs, with more breeds expected to be added in the coming weeks. Testing costs range from \$65 to \$105, and collecting DNA from a dog consists of a cheek swab. Test kits may be ordered online through HealthGene of Toronto, Canada.