



## The Soggy Dog Blog: Your Puppy's Coat

We'd like to take a moment to share some information and dispel some common myths about the fur coat of a Labrador Retriever. It may surprise you the number of questions that we get asked by new Lab owners and experienced ones alike that relate to their coats.

**Are there differences in personality between Labs of different colors?** This is one of the most common questions we get. The answer is a resounding NO. Coat color in dogs is no different than human hair color and there is absolutely NO connection between the color of your Lab's coat and his personality. Do you believe that blondes are dumb? Do you believe that redheads are fiery? Hopefully you recognize that those are stereotypes. Stereotypes exist in dogs too, believe it or not. Coat color in a Lab is determined by one allele in their entire DNA and it has no impact on anything other than their color.

**My Lab pup is very fair/ dark: will he stay this color?** Not likely. A Lab pup's coat is much like a baby's hair: the color is going to change as he matures. (Both a human and pup's eye colors will change too.) Black Labs' coats don't change much, other than as they gray, but a yellow Lab and a chocolate Lab can change quite a bit. Yellow Labs can turn lighter or darker (a lighter yellow or a redish) and chocolates can look more redish or more black as they age. Environment can affect this too. Our chocolate stud Pickett looks positively orange from the sun bleaching his fur after a summer running hunt tests!

**What's a Fox Red Lab? What's a White Lab? What's a Silver Lab?** The only three AKC-recognized Lab coat colors are black, yellow, and chocolate. However, in recent years, Lab breeders have been experimenting with coat variations. A "Fox Red" Lab is simply a yellow Lab with a deeper yellow coat, sometimes verging on "strawberry blonde." A "White" Lab is also a coat variation on a yellow Lab, just in the opposite direction. Instead of being more pigmented, their coat is *less* pigmented, verging on white. These "fancy" coat colors resulted by breeders simply selecting Lab males and females that had darker (or lighter) yellow coats than their litter mates and breeding them together...and then breeding those offspring to other males and females that were also darker, and so on.

Much debate is currently ensuing about the status of "Silver" Labs. In theory, the Silver Lab is a coat variation of the chocolate Lab. However, some research has shown that Silver Labs may actually have been the result of Lab breeders breeding chocolates to Weimaraners, in which case a "Silver Lab" then would be a mixed-breed dog and not a purebred Lab. Studies are still underway.

**Do Labs shed? I've heard they don't need to be groomed.** Yes and wrong. Labs are not hairless and they do shed. However, I find their shedding to be less than many other breeds and that it's easier to clean up. A quick two minute session with a hand vac picks up the fur in our house that tends to aggregate behind doors and near baseboards. It's pretty simple. Labs do require grooming as well, and in fact, regular grooming can massively reduce shedding. We have another [blog post on grooming](#) your Lab, but if you aren't up to it, it's relatively inexpensive to have done professionally. If you do have the time, most Labs love it and it can be a great bonding experience for you.

**Should I schedule my Lab for regular baths?** No. Your Lab's coat is like a duck's feathers: it's covered in a natural oil because he is a waterdog. This oil is put there by nature intentionally. Excessive bathing can strip this natural oil and cause excessive dryness. This excessive dryness can present symptoms that look like dandruff, dermatitis, or allergies. We tell our clients to treat their Lab like a fine garment: spot clean as necessary. A full-dip bath is only needed once in a while if he is *really* dirty or stinky.

Now that you have the facts about your Lab's fur coat, you can hopefully enjoy it more fully! Don't forget, research has shown that petting a dog can trigger the release of favorable hormones that make us feel happy and relaxed.\* Go enjoy those benefits now with yours, I'm sure he will be an obliging participant.

\* <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2012/03/09/146583986/pet-therapy-how-animals-and-humans-heal-each-other>