

Fenrir Tattoos

The wolf is a powerful animal in nature and mythological tales from around the world, making it one of the most popular designs for those looking to get inked. Fans of Norse mythology have several important wolves to choose from, such as Odin's faithful companions Geki and Freki, or Hati and Skoll, who are fated to chase the sun and moon until the end of the world. By far the most popular though is Fenrir, the infamous wolf that the gods themselves feared (and rightly so).

The monstrous beast is the child of the god Loki and the giantess (or jötunn) Angrboða. He is prophesied to kill Odin during Ragnarök at the end of the world. Fenrir appears in the 13th-century Old Norse texts, Edda and Heimskringla, and has endured in pop culture; appearing in the Marvel blockbuster *Thor: Ragnarok* and inspiring characters in fantasy novel series by JK Rowling, JRR Tolkien, and CS Lewis. Along with Odin's knot and Yggdrasil (the tree of life), Fenrir is one of the most popular modern tattoos inspired by Norse mythology.

Fenrir tattoo meanings

To learn about the different meanings Fenrir tattoos can have, we need to understand the story behind the mythological creature. Legend has it that the Aesir gods raised Fenrir from a small pup to the enormous wolf he became in order to prevent him from wreaking havoc throughout the nine realms. The gods became worried when they saw just how fast Fenrir was growing and decided they needed to chain him up. Their first two attempts were unsuccessful as Fenrir easily broke free, and for their third they enlisted the help of the dwarves to forge the strongest chains in existence.

Fenrir was told it was all a game to test his strength, but had grown wary and only agreed to proceed if one of the gods would place their hand in his mouth as a sign of trust. The god of war, Tyr, stepped up, knowing it would almost certainly mean the loss of his hand. When Fenrir was unable to break free, he brought his jaws down and Tyr's hand was ripped from his wrist. Fenrir's howls of fury gave forth to a foamy river called 'Expectation'. When Ragnarök comes, it's said that Fenrir will break free and devour the world with his lower jaw to the ground and his upper jaw to the sky.

As a symbol, Fenrir represents strength and power. After all, this is a creature that the gods themselves feared and one who is fated to quite literally devour the world. Depending on the style of the tattoo, Fenrir can also be used to symbolise the fight against adversity and oppression, breaking the strongest chains in the world.

A Fenrir tattoo can also be used to represent destiny: in mythology, he must fulfil the prophecy that states he will destroy the world and kill Odin, before being avenged by Odin's son Víðarr. Another meaning of a Fenrir tattoo is triumphant success. In a chapter from the Gylfaginning book of Edda, an enthroned figure states that to "loose from Leyding" and "strike out of Dromi" have become sayings for achieving something with great effort, referring to the first two chains that the gods tried to bind Fenrir with.

Main themes in Fenrir tattoos

There are several themes we see a lot of in Fenrir tattoos. For the most part, these are based on the mythology itself, with Fenrir as the main subject posed alongside key gods and beasts from the Old Norse tales. Other designs work runes into the tattoo, though it's always best to check with an expert when adding in characters and symbols from another alphabet to make sure there are no mistakes or mistranslations.

Fenrir vs Odin tattoo

One of the most common themes for a Fenrir tattoo sees the behemoth facing off against the All-Father himself. According to Norse mythology, Fenrir is fated to kill Odin during Ragnarök, and this makes for a powerful tattoo. The iconic moment will be instantly recognisable to other Viking enthusiasts and the contrast between man and beast is sure to be a dramatic scene, with Odin wielding his powerful spear Gungnir.

Fenrir wolf head tattoo

Wolf head tattoos have always been a popular choice given how majestic the animal looks face-on or howling at the moon. With a Fenrir tattoo, you have a chance to be a bit more creative by depicting the beast breaking free of his chains or brandishing the sword that once held his jaws open. You may be tempted to go grisly with it, but some of our favourite designs are on the minimal side and incorporate Scandinavian runes into the motif.

Fenrir, Skoll and Hati tattoo

We can't talk about Fenrir without mentioning the fact that he's a father. Skoll and Hati are Fenrir's children, and in the Eddic poem the Völuspá, they are the wolves that devour the sun and cause the downfall of the cosmos. Very little is mentioned of them, other than the fact that one chases the sun while the other chases the moon. This makes for some very interesting tattoo designs that share similarities with the Chinese Yin and Yang. Other designs share similarities with the three-headed Greek hellhound Cerberus, with Fenrir as the middle head and Skoll and Hati on either side.

Tyr and Fenrir tattoo

As we learned earlier, Tyr is a character that plays a key part in the story of Fenrir; being the only god brave enough to sacrifice his hand to imprison him. Tyr also has greater links to the wolf, as he was the god who was entrusted with raising him. A tattoo of a young Fenrir side by side with Tyr would make for an interesting design. For something a little more graphic, we recommend depicting the scene from the binding of Fenrir with the god of war's hand between the wolf's jaws. Whether or not you choose to include all the blood is up to you.

Body placement

With some design choices in mind, it's time to decide where on your body you want to get your Fenrir tattoo. There are no hard and fast rules for body placement here, as there isn't a whole lot of scientific evidence to suggest many Vikings had tattoos at all. However, one account from the 10th-century traveller Ibn Fadlan states that the Norsemen were "tattooed from the tips of their fingers to their necks", so the hand might be a good place to start.

Fenrir hand tattoo

Some of the best Fenrir hand tattoos we've seen are designed in a simple side profile style that mimics the traditional illustrations of the Middle Ages. Popular themes for hand tattoos include Fenrir battling Odin and carrying the sword that held his jaws open when the gods tricked him. Not only will a hand tattoo be clearly visible when channelling your inner Viking and brandishing an axe, but it's also a perfect opportunity to get a few runic symbols tattooed on your knuckles.

Make sure you're certain before you decide to get a hand tattoo. Don't forget that it will always be visible and be aware that some employers see them as unprofessional, which could sway their decision in job interviews.

Fenrir forearm tattoo

The forearm is always a good place to start if you're new to tattoos, as it's a relatively low pain area. It's also incredibly easy for your tattoo artist to reach, making it a perfect canvas for your Fenrir tattoo. Due to the length of the area, we think a design that features Fenrir breaking free of his chains is a great choice for a forearm tattoo. If you want to go with something truly ironic, this would be the ideal spot for a Fenrir and Tyr tattoo.

Fenrir tattoo sleeve

Tattoo sleeves are a big commitment, not to mention pretty painful as well, so make sure you know what you're getting into first. We think Fenrir is an excellent choice for a Norse tattoo sleeve; since he's known as an enormous creature, why not go all out and have the wolf wrapping around the full length of your arm? There's a lot of room for imagination here, as you have a whole cast of Norse gods and beasts to embellish your sleeve with. Be sure to check with your tattoo artist to see what ideas they have for a Fenrir sleeve. After all, they're the professional.

Fenrir tattoo ideas

Looking for a little inspiration for your Fenrir tattoo? We've got a few ideas for you. Although it's a nice idea to add in elements from Viking artwork in your tattoo design, there are no defined or traditional styles when it comes to Fenrir tattoos, meaning you're free to experiment however you like.

The big bad wolf

Sometimes the simplest ideas make the best tattoos. There's no doubting Fenrir's title as the original big bad wolf of Norse mythology, and we think he looks particularly fearsome with his jaws wide and snarling in a back or shoulder tattoo. To really pay homage to the myth, draw your design with a sword in his mouth, as this is how his chains were fastened when the Aesir gods imprisoned him.

The sun devourer

According to different interpretations of the myth, it's either Fenrir or Skoll and Hati that devour the sun during Ragnarök. Whichever you believe, we can't think of a much more powerful Norse

tattoo than a giant wolf with his jaws around the sun. This one works well as the basis for a sleeve, as you can add in other elements like his siblings, Hel and the World Serpent.

Viking style

Realistic versions of Fenrir work great for a tattoo but some of the designs we really love are drawn in the style of Viking artwork from The Middle Ages. The most well known style of Viking art is called Urnes and often contains complex patterns and shapes based on animals, along with Scandinavian runes. A good example of this style is the 'V' in the logo for the recent *Vikings* TV series. Try making Fenrir the subject of this intricate 2D art style.

Art-inspired

If you want a true masterpiece of a tattoo, look no further than the 20th-century artwork by Dorothy Hardy, 'Odin and Fenris' and 'The Binding of Fenris', which show the beast in bold monochrome tones at the final battle of the gods and being wrapped in chains. Of course, you'll need a pretty advanced tattoo artist to pull this off, so make sure you're going with an expert. Other sources of inspiration include the paintings 'Odin und Fenriswolf' and 'Fesselung des Fenriswolfe' by Emil Doepler.

The whole gang

Why stop at Fenrir? There are countless gods, giants and monsters in Norse mythology that we think will look great incorporated into a sleeve with Fenrir at the centre of the action. You could go for a design that includes gods like Odin and Thor, or if you're going for a tattoo that's inspired by horror, you could include creatures like the eight-legged horse Sleipnir or the undead draugr.

Conclusion

A Fenrir design is a strong choice for your first Viking tattoo, representing power and retaliation against those who would try and hold you back. It's a step up from a standard wolf tattoo and shows your dedication to all things Norse. Whether you choose to go for a faithful depiction of old Scandinavian tales such as the binding of Fenrir, or something imaginative like Fenrir battling the Aesir gods, we hope this has helped you to come up with your own Fenrir tattoo ideas. Check out Tattmag's other articles for more meanings and ideas behind other popular tattoo styles.