

IRISH TERRIER

A breed standard is the guideline which describes the ideal characteristics, temperament and appearance including the correct colour of a breed and ensures that the breed is fit for function. Absolute soundness is essential. Breeders and judges should at all times be careful to avoid obvious conditions or exaggerations which would be detrimental in any way to the health, welfare or soundness of this breed. If a feature or quality is desirable it should only be present in the right measure. However, if a dog possesses a feature, characteristic or colour described as unacceptable, it must not be rewarded in the show ring.

Most recent changes to this Standard have an effective date of 01/01/2026

ORIGIN

Ireland.

UTILISATION

Versatile farmyard dog, family pet, guard dog with utter contempt for danger or hurt, hunter, and Gundog.

BRIEF HISTORICAL SUMMARY

[ed. from FCI Breed Standard No. 139]

Ireland has produced four Terrier breeds, all of which are markedly different from Terriers on the continent and in England. The dog now officially called the Irish Terrier is possibly the oldest of the Irish Terrier breeds but records are so scarce that it would be difficult to prove this conclusively. Before the 1880s, the colour of the Irish Terrier had not been settled. Apart from red, they were sometimes black and tan, and sometimes brindle. At the end of the 19th century, efforts were made to breed out the black and tan and the brindles so that by the 20th century all Irish Terriers showed the red coat. The red-coated Irish Terrier soon made its appearance on show benches in England and in the United States, where it was enthusiastically received. The Irish Terrier's reputation was enhanced during the First World War when they were used as messenger dogs in the terrifying noise and confusion of trench warfare, thus proving both their intelligence and their fearlessness. The first breed club was set up in Dublin on 31 March 1879, and the Irish Terrier was the first member of the Terrier group to be recognised by the English Kennel Club in the late 19th century as a native Irish Breed.



Illustration courtesy of NKU Picture Library

GENERAL APPEARANCE

An active, lively, and wiry appearance; plenty of substance but free of clumsiness. Neither cloddy nor cobby, but showing a graceful, racy outline.

CHARACTERISTICS

There is a heedless, reckless pluck about the Irish Terrier that is characteristic. They develop a great devotion for their masters.

TEMPERAMENT

Good-tempered, notably with humans, it being admitted, however, that he is perhaps a little too ready to resent interference on the part of other dogs.

HEAD

Head long; skull flat, and rather narrow between ears, narrowing towards eye; free from wrinkles; stop hardly visible except in profile. Jaw strong and muscular, but not too full in cheek, and of good length. Foreface not dished or falling away quickly between eyes; delicately chiselled. Lips well-fitting and externally almost black in colour. Nose black.

Eyes:

Dark, relatively small, not prominent. A light or yellow eye undesirable.

Ears:

Small and V-shaped, of moderate thickness, set well on head, and dropping forward closely to cheek. Top of folded ear well above level of skull. Ear must be free of fringe, and hair, thereon, shorter and darker in colour than body.

Mouth:

Teeth even, strong and free from discolouration. Jaws strong, with perfect, regular scissor bite, i.e. upper teeth closely overlapping lower teeth and set square to the jaws.

NECK

Fair length and gradually widening towards shoulders, well-carried and free of throatiness. Generally a slight fringe at each side of neck, running nearly to corner of ear.

FOREQUARTERS

Shoulders fine, long, and well laid back. Legs moderately long, well set from shoulders, perfectly straight, with plenty of bone and muscle; elbows working freely, clear of sides; pasterns short and straight, hardly noticeable, the forelegs moved straightforward when travelling.

BODY

Chest deep and muscular, neither full nor wide. Body moderately long; back strong and straight, with no appearance of slackness behind shoulders; loin muscular and slightly arched; ribs fairly sprung, rather deep than round, and well ribbed back.

HINDQUARTERS

Strong and muscular, thighs powerful, hocks well let down, stifles moderately bent. Hind legs move straight forward when travelling, hocks not turned outwards. Hair on legs dense and crisp.

FEET

Strong, tolerably round, moderately small, toes arched, neither turned out nor in; black toe nails most desirable. Pads sound and free from cracks or horny excrescences [*ed. outgrowths*].

TAIL

Customarily docked.

Docked: Customarily docked to about three quarters. Free of fringe or feather, but well-covered with rough hair.

Set-on pretty high, carried gaily but not over back or curled.

Undocked: Set-on pretty high, carried gaily but not over back or curled. Free of fringe or feather but well-covered with rough hair. In overall balance with the rest of the dog. Carriage is such that the tail is not liable to damage during working.

[*refer note below]

GAIT / MOVEMENT

Forelegs and hind legs carried straight forward and parallel. Elbows move perpendicular to body, working free of sides, stifles turning neither in nor out.

COAT

Harsh and wiry, having broken appearance, free of softness or silkiness, not so long as to hide the outline of body, particularly in hindquarters; straight and flat, no shagginess and free of lock or curl. At base of these stiff hairs is growth of finer and softer hair, usually termed the undercoat. Hair on foreface crisp and only sufficiently long to impart appearance of additional strength. Hair on legs dense and crisp.

COLOUR

- Whole-coloured ranging from red, red/wheaten, or yellow/red.
- * Small amount of white on chest acceptable, white on feet highly undesirable.
- * Black shading highly undesirable.
- * Any other colour or combination of colours unacceptable.

SIZE

Ideal Height at withers:

Males: 48cm (approx. 19").

Females: 46cm (approx. 18").

N.B. Male animals should have two apparently normal testicles fully descended into the scrotum. Only functionally and clinically healthy dogs, with breed typical conformation should be used for breeding.

*Regardless of the provisions of the current KUSA-adopted standard, docked or formerly docked breeds may be shown at all FCI- and KUSA-licensed shows in South Africa, whether their tails are docked or natural. Under no circumstances are Judges permitted to

discriminate against exhibits on the grounds of docked or natural tails, and equal consideration for awards must be given to either.

FAULTS

Any departure from the foregoing points should be considered a fault and the seriousness with which the fault should be regarded should be in exact proportion to its degree and its effect upon the health and welfare of the dog, and on the dog's ability to perform its traditional work.

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When judging this breed at FCI International Shows, use:

FCI Standard No. 139:IRISH TERRIER

FCI Classification: Group 3 – Terriers.

Section 1 – Large- and medium-sized Terriers .

Without working trial.