

Terriers Are Entertaining and Silly, but They're Not for Everyone

They'll do tricks for treats, and covet attention from their humans, returning it in abundance. They are smart and inquisitive, but need to be trained with this character quality in mind. When properly trained, they're perfect for these types of owners.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Terriers belong to the terrier breed group, and each of the English-language kennel clubs recognizes certain breeds in the group, but not others
- The United Kennel Club (UKC) recognizes the largest number of terrier breeds at 46
- Most terriers were originally bred to hunt burrowing vermin, larger rodents, and even foxes
- Terriers tend to be independent-minded, and most do best as only pets in households without young children
- Terriers need to be properly socialized and trained, and regularly exercised. They make wonderful companions for knowledgeable pet parents

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Terriers belong to the Terrier Group, which is the name of a breed group. A breed group consists of dogs that are assigned to the group by a kennel club, for example, the American Kennel Club (AKC). Breed groups are frequently named for, and are loosely based on, ancestral dog types of modern dog breeds.

The Fédération Cynologique Internationale, which is the international kennel club association, includes terriers in the Terrier and Companion Group, and separates them into four sections. Section 1 is large and medium-sized terriers, Section 2 is small-sized terriers, Section 3 is bull-type terriers, and Section 4 is toy terriers.

Most of the major English-language kennel clubs, including the AKC, The Kennel Club (U.K.), the Canadian Kennel Club, and the Australian National Kennel Council, have a Terrier Group, though the breeds within each group vary from club to club.

For example, The Kennel Club (U.K.) includes 26 terrier breeds, whereas the United Kennel Club (U.S.) lists 46:¹

| United Kennel Club (US) Terrier Group | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Airedale Terrier | Miniature Bull Terrier |
| American Hairless Terrier | Miniature Schnauzer |
| American Pit Bull Terrier | Mountain Feist |
| Australian Terrier | Norfolk Terrier |
| Austrian Pinscher | Norwich Terrier |
| Bedlington Terrier | Parson Russell Terrier |
| Border Terrier | Patterdale Terrier |
| Bull Terrier | Rat Terrier |
| Cairn Terrier | Scottish Terrier |
| Cesky Terrier | Sealyham Terrier |
| Dandie Dinmont Terrier | Silky Terrier |
| Danish-Swedish Farmdog | Skye Terrier |
| Dutch Smoushond | Smooth Fox Terrier |
| German Pinscher | Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier |
| Glen of Imaal Terrier | Sporting Lucas Terrier |
| Irish Terrier | Staffordshire Bull Terrier |
| Jack Russell Terrier | Teddy Roosevelt Terrier |
| Jagdterrier | Toy Fox Terrier |
| Japanese Terrier | Treeing Feist |
| Kerry Blue Terrier | Welsh Terrier |
| Lakeland Terrier | West Highland White Terrier |
| Manchester Terrier | Wire Fox Terrier |

Wikipedia has a complete listing of terriers recognized by each of the six major English-language kennel clubs.

Terriers Are Earth Dogs

The name terrier is derived from the Latin word terra, which means "earth." This makes all kinds of sense, since most terriers were originally bred to "go to ground" (dig into the earth) in pursuit of burrowing vermin, including mice, rats, rabbits, otters, stoats, weasels, and sometimes even foxes. According to Animal Planet:

"These fiery little dynamos would dig up underground dens and burrows while barking furiously, forcing the inhabitants out where hunters awaited. Some breeds were even bred to finish the job themselves.

*Let loose in your backyard, a terrier can build an entire golf course in a day — the 18 holes at least. Too large to go to ground, the popular Airedale terrier puts its strength and stubborn streak to use as a surprisingly ferocious watchdog."*²

Today, most terriers are pets and companions. A few are still used as working terriers, and some terriers (like the Airedale) are large enough to be kept as guard dogs.

The Terrier Temperament — Feisty and Energetic

The word used most often to describe terriers is feisty. Terrier lovers agree that it's a good thing many of the breeds are small, because their determined nature and endless energy can make them difficult dogs for average pet parents to handle. According to Animal Planet:

"Due to some unscrupulous breeders and unmindful owners, a few breeds within the terrier group have developed rather notorious reputations. The crossing of bulldogs and terriers for the express purpose of creating fighting dogs has produced several dog breeds that can be dangerous in the wrong hands.

*Combining the taut muscles and compact power of the bulldog with the tenacity and aggressiveness of the terrier, some controversial bull terrier breeds have been involved in some highly publicized **biting incidents**, several involving small children.*

When these dogs bite, they don't let go. Unfortunately, these incidents tarnish the reputations of what can be friendly, stable, and even calm pets. But without the right training and socialization, and in irresponsible hands, these can be dangerous dogs."

Terriers typically aren't crazy about other animals, including other dogs. Their instinctive drive to chase small creatures is almost impossible to extinguish, which means they often do best in households without cats or small pets.

Terriers aren't the best choice for families with small children, either. They lack patience, and they like to be the center of attention at all times. These breeds also tend to be territorial and will bark at anyone they feel is encroaching on their turf.

Terriers Make Wonderful Companions for Knowledgeable Guardians

Training a terrier can be challenging because these dogs are independent-minded and like to have things their way. But with that said, it's extremely important to properly socialize and train them. Positive reinforcement behavior training is the only way to go with these dogs, insuring that sessions are short in duration, fun, stimulating, and involve

lots of treats, petting, and praise.

Daily heart-thumping exercise is just as important as training for terriers — even the tiny ones. These dogs are smart, inquisitive, and easily bored. A bored terrier can be a problem, and the best antidote is to stimulate his body and mind with regular physical exertion.

Exercise also keeps the weight off smaller terrier breeds who tend to get chunky when overindulged.

Even though they can be a handful, for knowledgeable owners, terriers make fabulous pets. They are often very entertaining and silly, and can easily learn to perform tricks for treats. They love attention from their humans, and they return it in abundance. Properly socialized and trained terriers make perfect pets for older folks, adult-only homes, and families with older children.

Sources and References

[VetStreet February 19, 2015 \(Archived\)](#).

[Petwave \(Archived\)](#).

¹ [United Kennel Club \(Archived\)](#).

² [Animal Planet \(Archived\)](#).
