

CATHLEEN PETERS SAITO

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO WELSH TERRIERS



The Complete Guide to

Welsh Terriers

Cathleen Peters Saito

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Table of Contents

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Acknowledgments | 1 |
|------------------------------|---|

Chapter 1

| | |
|--|----|
| History and Description | 3 |
| Introduction..... | 3 |
| Welsh Terrier History..... | 5 |
| Physical Characteristics..... | 8 |
| Welsh Terrier Temperament and Behavior | 12 |
| Is a Welsh Terrier a Good Fit for You? | 17 |

Chapter 2

| | |
|---|----|
| Life Stages of the Welsh Terrier | 19 |
| The Puppy | 19 |
| The Adolescent..... | 23 |
| The Adult..... | 25 |
| The Senior | 26 |

Chapter 3

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| Choosing a Welsh Terrier | 29 |
| Buying vs. Adopting | 29 |
| Age and Sex Considerations..... | 30 |
| Finding a Responsible Breeder | 32 |
| Communicating with Your Breeder | 35 |

| | |
|--|----|
| Health Tests and Certifications and Questions..... | 38 |
| Tips for Picking Your Puppy..... | 40 |
| Researching Rescues..... | 41 |
| Tips for Adopting a Welsh Terrier..... | 44 |

Chapter 4

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Preparing for Your Welsh Terrier..... | 45 |
| Getting Your Children and Current Pets Ready..... | 46 |
| Preparing Your Home..... | 48 |
| A Safe Space for Your Dog..... | 49 |
| Preparing Outside Spaces..... | 49 |
| Get the Essentials..... | 53 |
| Nutrition..... | 55 |
| Choosing a Vet & Other Professionals..... | 59 |

Chapter 5

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Bringing Home Your Welsh Terrier..... | 61 |
| The Importance of Having a Plan..... | 61 |
| Introducing Your Human Family..... | 64 |
| If There Is Already Another Dog at Home..... | 65 |
| Introducing Your Cat..... | 68 |
| The First Night..... | 70 |
| First Vet Visit..... | 72 |
| Puppy Classes..... | 74 |
| Toy Safety..... | 75 |

Chapter 6

| | |
|--|----|
| House-training Your Welsh Terrier | 77 |
| The Importance of Routine..... | 77 |
| Supervision during House-training..... | 78 |
| Positive Reinforcement | 80 |
| Where a Dog Goes Potty | 81 |
| The Puppy | 82 |
| The Adult..... | 84 |
| Marking | 85 |
| Potty on Command..... | 86 |
| Pee Pads and Other Indoor Potty Alternatives | 87 |
| Crate Training..... | 88 |

Chapter 7

| | |
|--|-----|
| Grooming Your Welsh Terrier | 91 |
| The Welsh Terrier Coat..... | 91 |
| Brushing..... | 91 |
| Stripping vs. Clipping..... | 93 |
| Bathing..... | 99 |
| Nails..... | 101 |
| Ears..... | 102 |
| Eyes..... | 104 |
| Doggy Dental Care..... | 105 |
| Final Thoughts on Grooming..... | 106 |

Chapter 8

| | |
|--|-----|
| Health Care | 107 |
| Vaccinations..... | 107 |
| Internal and External Parasites | 109 |
| How to Help Your Welsh Terrier Live Longer | 111 |
| Welsh Terrier Health Problems..... | 113 |
| Is It an Emergency? | 118 |
| First Aid | 119 |
| Pet Insurance..... | 120 |

Chapter 9

| | |
|--|-----|
| Building Confidence and Making Friends—Human & Canine | 121 |
| Why Early Socialization Is Important..... | 122 |
| Tips for Socializing Your Puppy..... | 123 |
| Teaching Your Dog How to Greet People | 125 |
| Introducing Your Welsh Terrier to Other People’s Dogs.. | 126 |
| Welsh Terriers and Small Children | 128 |
| Being a Good Neighbor..... | 131 |
| Dog Laws..... | 132 |

Chapter 10

| | |
|--|-----|
| Training | 133 |
| The Benefits of Proper Training..... | 136 |
| Taking Classes/Lessons vs. Sending Your Welshie to a Trainer | 137 |

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Choosing a Trainer..... | 138 |
| Practice Matters | 140 |
| Behave Yourself | 140 |
| Training Tips | 142 |

Chapter 11

| | |
|--|-----|
| Basic Lessons | 145 |
| May I Have Your Attention, Please? | 146 |
| Coming When Called | 147 |
| Sit and Release | 150 |
| Walking On-leash | 153 |
| Stand | 156 |
| Down | 156 |
| Stay | 157 |
| Leave It..... | 158 |
| Drop It | 160 |
| Tricks | 160 |

Chapter 12

| | |
|--|-----|
| Behavioral Issues | 161 |
| Living with a Teenage Welsh Terrier..... | 162 |
| Chewing..... | 163 |
| Biting..... | 164 |
| Growling: Listen, Don't Scold..... | 166 |
| Resource Guarding | 166 |
| The Incurrible People-Jumper | 168 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Barking | 169 |
| Digging | 171 |
| Separation Anxiety..... | 171 |
| When You Need Help | 172 |
| If You Don't Want or Can't Keep Your Welsh Terrier | 173 |

Chapter 13

| | |
|---|-----|
| Traveling with Your Welsh Terrier | 175 |
| Planning Your Trip | 176 |
| Dog Crates and Other Restraints..... | 177 |
| Preparing Your Welsh Terrier for the Trip | 180 |
| Packing for Your Dog..... | 182 |
| Travel Tips..... | 183 |
| When You Can't Take Your Dog on a Trip | 185 |

Chapter 14

| | |
|--|-----|
| Activities for Welsh Terriers | 187 |
| Faux Hunting Games | 188 |
| Companion Activities..... | 198 |
| Speedy Dog Sports | 203 |
| The Nose Knows | 208 |
| Have Fun and Make Friends as Your Dog Earns Accolades | 208 |

Chapter 15

| | |
|---|-----|
| The Senior Welsh Terrier | 209 |
| Basics of Senior Dog Care | 209 |
| Helping Your Dog Adapt to Old Age | 211 |
| End of Life | 213 |
| Grieving the Loss of Your Pet | 215 |

Chapter 16

| | |
|---|-----|
| Resources for Welsh Terrier Owners | 217 |
| Health | 217 |
| End of Life | 218 |
| Travel | 219 |
| Dog Tricks | 219 |
| Earthdog and Ratting..... | 219 |
| Companion Dog Activities..... | 220 |
| Lure Coursing/Terrier Racing | 220 |
| Flyball | 220 |
| Agility | 221 |
| Nose Work | 221 |
| Training | 221 |
| Books & Magazines..... | 222 |

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CHAPTER 1

History and Description

Introduction

The Welsh Terrier is an outgoing, energetic, and friendly medium-sized dog. The average life span for the terriers, affectionately called Welshies, is 12 to 15 years.

This ancient breed from Wales was originally bred to control rats and other vermin on farms and hunt foxes, badgers, and otters in underground dens and rock formations. They were developed by rural people who toiled to make a living on the Welsh land—not the aristocracy.

Today, the Welsh Terrier is among the At Watch breeds on the United Kingdom's Kennel Club (KC) list of native breeds in danger of disappearing. Dog breeds that originated in the UK and have fewer than 300 KC registrations per year are listed as Vulnerable. Those with 300 to 450 KC registrations per year, such as the Welsh Terrier, are listed as At Watch.

Though its numbers are generally small, this breed can be found in many countries around the world. The first recorded import of Welsh Terriers into the United States occurred in 1886, and the Welsh Terrier Club of America was formed in 1900. In the 1960s, John F. Kennedy had a Welsh Terrier named Charlie in the White House.

While the modern Welsh Terrier is primarily a show dog and pet, the traits that made it a specialized hunter centuries ago are still strong in the breed. Understanding the working history and traits of this breed is the key to comprehending the current generation and forming a good relationship with individual dogs.



My second Welsh Terrier, Champion Rubicon's Sugar Bear, taught me the importance of the working instincts in the breed. This beautiful black and tan dog came into my life after he retired from a successful career in the show ring.

Months after we got him, I saw a flyer for an upcoming American Working Terrier Association (AWTA) den trial: a test in an artificial underground tunnel of a terrier's (or Dachshund's) natural working instinct. It was nearby, so my husband and I packed the car and headed to our first AWTA trial with Bear. We failed the test that day because my dog took too long to get to the end of the tunnel, but after it, Bear was happier than I had ever seen him.

That day I realized the importance of the working instinct in Welsh Terriers. It started my quest to learn more about their prey-driven behaviors and led to many wonderful adventures for me with Bear.

Welsh Terriers were originally bred to do a job, and to this day, they crave working for their owners. Understanding and utilizing the ancient hunting instincts still deeply embedded in this breed can make

training them much easier and life with them a joy. Trying to ignore or squelch these traits can only serve to make the lives of both dog and owner difficult.

Welsh Terrier History

The name of this breed tells its history. The term “terrier” derives from the Latin word “terra,” which means earth. Terriers are hunting dogs that originally specialized in digging for small game and pursuing quarry underground. The “Welsh” part of the name denotes Wales as the area where this particular working terrier was developed. As early as the 10th century, small working terriers may have helped farmers in the British Isles protect their land from vermin such as mice, rats, foxes, and badgers. They also would have been useful for hunting rabbits.

The exact origin of Welsh Terriers is not known. Some people argue the breed descends from the Old English Black and Tan Terrier. But others believe the Welsh Terrier is ancestor to the many types of black and tan terriers found throughout the British Isles. However, the truth has been obscured over the centuries. I. Morlais Thomas, author of *The Welsh Terrier Handbook* in 1959, questioned why the people of Wales wouldn't have developed their own Welsh Terrier to hunt the abundant vermin in that country. He points out that the people of Wales developed their own Welsh Pony, Welsh Black Cattle, and a number of Welsh dog breeds, including the Welsh Springer Spaniel and Welsh Hound. So why not their own Welsh Terrier?

The first mention of a black and tan terrier, possibly the Welsh Terrier, in literature was made by a Welsh poet in 1450. It mentions a gift of “...a good black and red terrier bitch, to throttle the brown polecat and to tear up the red fox.”

In the early days of the breed, Welsh Terriers were valued for their working abilities and not for their looks. The dogs had to be confident and brave enough to face a foe in dark and unfamiliar spaces underground and agile and energetic enough to scamper over rocky terrain and work in narrow tunnels. When hunting otters, working terriers had to be able to swim because the entrance to an otter's riverbank den was sometimes underwater.

Welsh Terriers used all their senses in the hunt for foxes, otters, and badgers below ground and rats and rabbits above ground. They also needed to be smart and resourceful enough not to be killed by their quarry. After a hard day's work, these dogs were good-tempered enough to enjoy the warmth of their owner's hearth with the family. The early Welsh Terrier also hunted with hounds and had to be calm and sociable to work with the packs. These little dogs also needed the stamina to run with hounds and a strong constitution to survive the elements.

Welsh Terriers barked and nipped at their quarry to make it leave its subterranean refuge and go above ground to the waiting hunter, or they made enough noise beneath the earth for hunters to dig to them. When the animal couldn't be bolted or dug, these terriers were expected to make a kill in the earth. The Welsh fox was considered so fierce that some hunters would send two or three Welsh Terriers down a hole at the same time to dispatch it. The traits of confidence, gameness, intelligence, energy, sociability, and calmness were so strongly bred into early working Welsh Terriers that these characteristics continue in the breed today.

Understanding this working history is key to understanding and developing the best possible relationship with individual Welsh Terriers. In the early days of the breed, pedigrees were not kept. The best working dogs were bred to the best working bitches.

The Kennel Club of England did not exist until 1873. Before that time, early dog shows took place at agricultural events, with Welsh Terriers being shown in classes like the Working Terrier class. The first show with separate classes for Welsh Terriers was held in Wales in 1884.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Welsh Terrier Club of America (WTCA)



Founded in 1900, the Welsh Terrier Club of America (WTCA) is this breed's American Kennel Club (AKC) parent club. From annual conformation shows to quarterly newsletters, the WTCA strives to educate dog owners and the public about responsible ownership, health, and standards of the Welsh Terrier. Members of the WTCA must be sponsored by two members in good standing and sign a code of ethics upon acceptance. For more information about becoming a WTCA or the club's annual shows, visit www.welshterrier.org.

Starting in the 1850s, there was a dispute between two factions as to whether the breed was actually the Old English Black and Tan Terrier (OEBTT) or the Welsh Terrier. The Kennel Club recognized classes for both terriers starting in 1885. The Welsh Terrier prevailed and continued on its new path to show dog stardom in 1887, when the Kennel Club ended classes for the OEBTT.

The first champion Welsh Terriers looked a bit different from today's Welshie. As people began to realize the value of champion show dogs, more emphasis was placed on physical beauty by the breeders. Over the years, the head of the Welsh Terrier has become a little longer, the furnishings (hair on the face and legs) and coat have become more plentiful, and some modern dogs may have chests that are too big for their original work below ground in Wales.

The chest of a working terrier should be spannable by an average man's hand if that dog is the right size to work quarry underground. To span a dog, the hands are placed around its chest behind its elbows, with fingers touching. The thumbs should slightly overlap on top of the spine as the dog's front legs are lifted slightly off the ground. This is a measurement long used by people who hunt their terriers in the earth; it is not used for modern Welshies in the show ring.

During World War I, the courage, tenacity, stamina, and trainability of the Welsh Terrier helped them succeed as messenger dogs for Great Britain's army. In the midst of heavy bombardments, when telephone communications were near impossible and human runners too risky, these dogs braved smoke, noise, shell holes, vehicle traffic, corpses, muddy terrain, and even poisonous gas to carry important messages between the front lines and headquarters.

I personally witnessed the tenacity of a Welsh Terrier to overcome all obstacles when performing a job at an AWTA den trial held after a torrential rainstorm. The ground was saturated, and there was up to an inch of water in some parts of the artificial tunnel.

Qualifying dogs that are fastest to reach the rats are given awards at AWTA trials. In my experience, small Jack Russell-type Terriers usually win the top prize. But on this day, when most dogs were cautious in the mud and water, my Welshie paid no heed to those conditions and put all

the other dogs to shame as she crawled at high speed through the mud and water to reach the tunnel's end.

In some European countries, the breed is still used for hunting above and below ground. And while Welsh Terriers are not often used for hunting in the United States today, they still retain the character traits that once made them good hunters in Wales. These working qualities have helped these dogs find success in new jobs.

Nowadays, the Welsh Terrier is an accomplished show dog and cherished pet. The breed has produced show champions in many countries and won numerous Best-In-Show awards around the world. Outside of the ring, these dogs add a spark of joy to the lives of their owners.

In addition to the show ring, the modern Welsh Terrier has found success in the agility ring. Finnish Welsh Terrier Dirty Harry (FI Ch C.I.A. FI & SE & NO AgCh Vicway Dirty Harry), bred by Sari Mäkelä, was the FCI Individual Agility World Champion in his height category in 1999. Today, many Welsh Terriers and their owners enjoy competing in agility rings around the world. Welsh Terriers in the United States also currently participate in obedience, freestyle, trick dog, tracking, and artificial den trials, as well as in therapy dog visits and other events.

Physical Characteristics

“

The Welsh Terrier is a good fit for those looking for physical characteristics such as small and sturdy, with a medium-length wiry coat that does not shed much. In some ways, the Welsh Terrier is a very 'average' dog; its physical characteristics are not extreme in ways that other breeds may be. It is not very large or very small, very longhaired or very shorthaired, very long-backed or very short-legged, extra-short-nosed or extra-long-eared, very wrinkly, or very drooly.

LUCY BAILEY

WYSIWYG Welsh Terriers

”

*Photo Courtesy of
Rhonda Cassidy*



GChS Abbyrose Black Diamond in show groom

The Welsh Terrier of today has been smartened up over the years for the show ring. However, it is still a rugged-looking, medium-sized dog.

My dog Bear was a striking creature to behold. Having been successful in the show ring, he had a medium-sized body that was sturdy and well-balanced. He exuded power, confidence, and joy on our daily walks, and people often stopped to meet him and compliment his good looks. Both men and women thought him a very attractive dog.

Welsh Terriers aren't flashy or fancy. Nor are they coarse. The Welsh Terrier's appearance is one of moderation and balanced parts. Their solid, compact bodies, brick-shaped heads, and wiry coats give them a workmanlike appearance that is fitting for a dog that originally belonged to the common man.

The Welsh Terrier is described as a square dog, meaning it's as tall as it is long, with a rectangular-shaped head. Males generally stand about 15 to 15 1/2 inches tall at the withers (the bony protrusion that is the top of

the shoulders between the neck and back) and have an average weight of 20 pounds. Bitches tend to be a little smaller. Of course, there is variation in size, with some Welsh being larger or smaller than the average.

The planes of the Welsh head are level, and the foreface should be the same length as the forehead. The strong muzzle is only slightly narrower than the back skull. The cheeks are a little more muscular than the Wire Fox Terrier. Between the ears, the Welsh head is flat and slightly wider than the Fox Terrier. Just below the forehead, the Welsh have a very slight stop, the area where the muzzle meets the skull at a longitudinal angle, between small, almond-shaped, dark brown eyes. This terrier's eyes are well set in the skull, placed a fair distance apart, and very expressive.

The small V-shaped ears of the Welsh Terrier fold just above the skull to fall forward near the outside corner of the eye when they are relaxed. Welsh Terriers can move their ears slightly up and forward when they are attentive. These folded ears would have protected the original working Welsh Terriers' ears from dirt as they hunted underground.

Traditionally, the furnishings (whiskers and eyebrows) on the face are groomed so that the outline of the head resembles a brick. From the head, a moderately long, thick neck with a slight arch descends gently into long, sloping shoulders.

Welsh Terriers have what is termed a straight front, or terrier front. If you observe the dog's body in side profile, the point of the shoulder is level with the fore chest. This means that the shoulder does not protrude past the front of the chest. This does not mean that the shoulders, from the front point to the highest point, are upright. They still need to lie back with good angulation for the dog to have an adequate stride.

The Welsh Terrier's straight front evolved for its original work digging quarry in the earth. For this construction, the upper arm is slightly shorter than the shoulder. This ensures that the dog's elbows are not impeded by the deepest part of the chest when crawling and digging through tunnels. Their front legs are straight like columns with toes pointing forward. It's a front-end assembly that makes for a very powerful digger when the dog is navigating a fox or badger den.

The topline of the Welsh is level, and the top of its head should be about the same height as the top of the docked tail. (An undocked tail



*Photo Courtesy of
John Melair*

Honeypaw's Super Nova

might be about an inch or so longer.) In the United States, Welsh tails are docked. This has long been the tradition in the breed. But as more countries have banned tail docking, some Welsh Terriers are appearing in the United States with unmodified tails. These tails are sturdy and set high on the back.

A solid tail was important for these dogs' original work underground because it provided hunters with a solid handle for pulling the dogs out of the earth when necessary. A healthy Welsh Terrier will carry its tail in an upright and confident manner.

A Welsh Terrier's hindquarters are strong and muscular. They should have good drive from behind, but the stride of the rear legs should not be longer than that of the front legs. The movement of the Welsh Terrier is balanced, workmanlike, and ground-covering. It is not an up-and-down prance or an extremely long and floating stride.

Welsh Terriers belong to a double-coated breed. That means the Welsh Terrier has a soft, short undercoat for insulation and a close-fitting thick and wiry topcoat for protection from rain, wind, and dirt. The furnishings on the head and legs are, in the best of cases, dense and wiry. This dog rarely sheds if brushed and combed at least once a week

and clipped or hand-stripped several times a year. In fact, if regularly brushed, most Welshies do not require frequent bathing. They may only need a bath a couple of times a year except in certain situations, such as when the dog rolls in mud or in something stinky.

My terrier, Bear, had a red “tan” on his head, underbelly, butt, and legs that was set off beautifully by a jet-black jacket and undercoat on his back. This ebony color spread along his neck and the top of his tail and into his upper thighs. He had a few white hairs interspersed with the black hairs of his jacket, which were nice proof for dog show judges that he was not artificially colored.

The Welsh Terrier head, underbelly, butt, and legs are a tan that can range from deep red to slightly lighter shades. Their jackets can be black or grizzle (a black and tan-blended color). Born mostly black, the color of Welsh Terrier puppies gradually changes during their first year so that the head, legs, underbelly, and butt become tan while the jacket stays black or changes to grizzle. Their nose and lips remain black, as do the pads of their feet and their toenails.

Welsh Terrier Temperament and Behavior

“

Welshies are typically very active, curious, and intelligent dogs. They enjoy being involved in whatever you are doing. If they get bored, they will usually seek entertainment for themselves—this can be good or bad! They should be indoor dogs, but with a securely fenced backyard to run off energy and safely chase after squirrels.

ELIZABETH BERRY

Airedale and Welsh Terrier Rescue

”

Genetics and early socialization influence temperament and behavior. Temperament tendencies at birth vary somewhat, but when properly

raised, an adult Welsh Terrier should be outgoing, energetic, playful, and friendly. Devoted to their owners, individual Welshies show affection in different ways. Some want to be lapdogs, smothering you with kisses; others prefer to lie attentively near you, showing proper gratitude for pats and neck rubs. I've had both types and loved them all.

Blended uniquely with the Welsh Terrier's calm demeanor is a strong prey drive. All dogs possess some degree of prey drive, but it is generally stronger in certain types of dogs, such as terriers, hounds, retrievers, and herding dogs. This means they have a powerful instinct to hunt or chase prey. The dangerous earthwork of this breed's early days required an intense focus and strong will that still exist today. Some people find this mental strength and intensity a problem, but with a little know-how, it can actually be very useful in training a Welsh.

Small animals, running children, moving cars, bikes, and skateboards may all excite your dog's prey drive. While you cannot extinguish it completely, in some situations, you can somewhat desensitize a Welshie to certain things that excite the hunting instinct or redirect the dog's attention.

Welsh Terriers should always be given an acceptable outlet for their prey drive, such as toys or artificial den trials. However, keep in mind that prey drive is not the same thing as aggression toward other dogs or aggression toward people. That's not the correct temperament for a Welshie. If another dog challenges them, this breed won't back down, but a well-bred, properly raised and socialized Welsh Terrier won't instigate aggression with other dogs.

In the early years of the breed, a dog's day was spent patrolling for vermin or hunting in the earth. A Welshie had plenty of space to work out any doggy-politic issues with other canines on the farm. At the end of the day, these hardworking terriers came inside for a well-earned rest. Today's Welsh Terrier doesn't spend the day performing dangerous and exhausting work, and the space it inhabits is limited. Consequently, squabbles between cohabiting dogs can happen when jealousy rears its ugly head.

A Welsh Terrier that is sociable with dogs away from home can be prone to jealousy on its own turf. I have observed some dogs become jealous when another canine in the home gets attention from their



Ch. Rubicon's Sugar Bear, CD, OA, OAJ, NJP, ME, CG, CGC

person. An owner must be a firm, consistent leader to maintain peace in a multiple-dog home with a Welsh Terrier. Welsh Terriers have strong personalities, and if an owner is not willing to be the leader, these dogs will step into the leadership void and take control. A dog that would be a wonderful companion with an owner who is a firm leader can quickly



become a little tyrant with a too-lenient owner.

For this and other reasons, Welshies are better suited to a modern home environment where they are the only dog, or there is only one other dog. If there is a second dog in the home, it often works best to have dogs of opposite sexes.

Welsh Terriers will not tolerate physical abuse, torment, or teasing. This could cause them to become aggressive to defend themselves. For this reason, an adult should always supervise

young children with a Welsh Terrier, even after the dog is trained. (This is a good rule to follow with all dog breeds.) Welshies should not be left alone to babysit young children. In fact, in a family with kids of any age, all of them need to be taught how to interact with their Welsh Terrier, and the dog also needs to learn how to behave with humans of all ages. A Welshie can be an affectionate companion for children, but only with proper vigilance and training of both the kids and the canine.

Welsh Terriers are watchful and alert to all their senses, which means they can be easily distracted. They are also very sensible, extremely intelligent, and easy to train by someone who knows how to focus their attention. The modern training methods of positive reinforcement work well with this breed. Woe to the owner who underestimates the intelligence of a Welsh Terrier because a Welshie is always learning, even when you don't intend to teach.

One of my Welsh Terriers once watched attentively as I cut hundreds of daffodils to be used as part of the décor at a friend's wedding. An entire year later, this same dog watched again as I was cutting a few daffodils. Then, he suddenly started running and grabbing daffodil flowers, ripping them from their stalks. I was so stunned, and it happened so quickly that I didn't even try to stop him. A moment later, my Welshie ran

to me with the last flower hanging from his mouth and wagging his tail. I thanked him for the flower as I took it from his mouth, and I never again cut flowers while he was watching.

Welsh Terriers really want to work for their owners and will sometimes figure out their own jobs. They can be very creative when inventing one. They are “people” dogs that should live in the home rather than outdoors. They crave the company of humans and aren’t happy left outside for hours without human attention. A Welshie may bark because it wants to come into the house. However, this breed is not typically yappy. When a Welsh barks, it is barking for a reason. Perhaps, for example, it has been left in a yard where it can see squirrels running around. Barking is part of the breed’s natural hunting instinct. It is up to owners not to put their terrier in this situation for lengthy periods and expect the dogs to stay quiet.

Some people mistakenly believe that allowing a Welsh Terrier to participate in artificial den trials teaches the dogs to bark. But Welshies already know how to bark, and they already possess a prey drive. An artificial den trial simply gives a dog an approved outlet for such an impulse. It is the owner’s responsibility to acclimate a dog to normal occurrences and to keep it from barking, say, when someone knocks on the front door. My Welshies have always been very quiet in the house once they’ve understood life’s normal occurrences.

Even though Welsh Terriers were originally bred to hunt and dig in the earth, I’ve found that they are not random diggers. When they dig, it is with a purpose. If a yard has moles or voles or some other vermin burrowing underground, a Welshie is likely to dig to the creature. Welshies may also try to dig under a fence if they desperately want to get out or get to something on the other side. So, it is best not to leave them alone in a yard for long periods of time. The earth beneath fences for Welsh Terriers should have reinforcements to prevent dogs from digging out.

It’s important to keep in mind that the Welsh Terrier is a rugged breed originally created for a very dangerous job. They do not suffer fools or tolerate abuse. These are intense and intelligent “people” dogs with a lot of prey drive and a strong will. In the right home (with or without children), a Welshie makes an incredibly attentive and playful companion that is happy to accompany its family on life’s adventures.

Is a Welsh Terrier a Good Fit for You?

How do you know if a Welsh Terrier is right for you and your family? To determine this, you first need to carefully evaluate yourself and your circumstances. Next, you need to research the breed.

This book is a good beginning for breed research, and you will find additional resources listed at the end of it. You can also contact reputable breeders to get their input and visit dog events to observe Welsh Terriers and talk with Welsh fanciers in person. You should do all of this before you decide whether this is the breed for you. Once you have gathered as much information as possible, you can compare the breed characteristics with your needs and circumstances to decide if this would be a suitable match.

A Welsh Terrier can be a silly, playful, attentive, intelligent, and devoted pet in the right home, but it is also a strong-willed, intense, and energetic dog with a high prey drive. As touched on earlier, this breed requires an owner who is a leader, teacher, cheerleader, exercise buddy, and companion to his or her dog. It also helps if the owner has a sense of humor. If you lead with patience, firmness, and consistency and reward good behavior, a Welshie will follow you wholeheartedly.

Welsh Terriers are very adaptable to their environment, so while a home with a fenced yard is ideal for them, they can do well as apartment dogs if provided with enough exercise. Any area where a Welsh will be loose should be fenced for the dog's protection and to avoid troublesome encounters with other animals.

Welsh Terriers have a lot of energy, but they are not self-exercisers, so you will need to exercise them regularly. If you put them in a fenced yard alone, they won't jog or run around the yard mindlessly. An intense session of fetch or a 15- to-30-minute brisk walk twice a day will provide the minimum amount of physical exertion needed for an adult Welshie. Teenage dogs will need more exercise. Puppies need more frequent but shorter and less strenuous periods of exercise every day, and they should not be left alone for long periods of time.

Welsh Terriers also need mental stimulation so they don't become bored and get into mischief. Here are a few ways to provide mental stimulation for a Welshie:

- Trick training
- A puzzle toy
- A treat-dispensing ball that makes a dog work for treats
- A chew toy stuffed with peanut butter.

Although these dogs have a high prey drive, it's possible for them to be introduced at a young age to cats and other small animals in a household. An owner must teach a young Welshie how to live with other animals and must remain ever vigilant. If you have small children and aren't capable of always supervising them with a dog, don't get a Welsh Terrier. If you do get one, you'll need to have the time to teach your dog how to behave with your children and to teach your children how to treat a dog.

If you don't want to be a leader and prefer to let your dog do what it wants, don't get a Welsh Terrier. No dog of any breed is born knowing how to be a good pet, but some dogs require less training than a Welsh Terrier. There are breeds with a more submissive nature, a lower prey drive, lower energy, and less need for human companionship. Don't get a Welsh Terrier just because you like its looks and think you can change its characteristic temperament and behavior. That rarely works out well. Get a dog whose temperament, behavior, and lifestyle needs fit yours. If that happens to be a Welsh Terrier, you won't regret it.