

# The Irish Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier

The Soft-Coated Wheaten Terrier  
(in the Irish language :  
"An Brocaire Bui"- literally,  
"Yellow Terrier") is a  
pure-breed terrier  
originating from Ireland.







**History** The Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier as a farm dog appears to have had its humble beginnings come from a mixed ancestry. For over 200 years, there were textual references to ‘soft-coated dogs’ which were later combined in the formation of its cousins, the Irish Terrier and Kerry Blue Terrier, which were said to be deliberately bred from the beginning. Wheatens were the poor crofter’s dog as they were not permitted to keep a dog over the value of five pounds. They were bred to earn their keep by hunting badgers, otters and other vermin, do some poaching and attend to the herd, the jack of all trades on the farm. They also had to be a good watch dog, family pet, constant companion and extremely affectionate with that beautiful coat keeping the family warm at night.

By the 1930’s, enthusiasts became more selective and developed the breed’s distinctive traits and they were recognised by the Irish Kennel Club in 1937. From that time onwards the breed won many hearts and steadily gained popularity in England and across Europe, then on to America and arrived in Australia in 1979.

## **Appearance**

They are a compact, medium sized terrier of substance, covered with a glorious soft, silky coat that is the colour of ripening wheat and falls naturally in loose curls or waves, which is known for its hypoallergenic qualities.

The Wheaten’s black rimmed, dark hazel eyes are covered with a profuse ‘fall’ which blends into ample furnishings over their whole face. Their strong rectangular head with medium sized ears usually trimmed around the edges, give them a characteristic terrier appearance. They are a square dog (measured from withers to base of tail/withers to ground), strongly built and muscular, well balanced in structure and movement, using long, low strides to cover ground efficiently and are not exaggerated in any way.

They stand and move with head and tail up, giving the appearance of a happy, active dog, full of character. Dogs can be up to 49cm in height and 20kg in weight, with bitches appropriately smaller.

## **Temperament and Character**

They are a highly intelligent and inquisitive breed with a wonderful sense of humour and do well when trained and socialised from an early age using positive reinforcement. They tend not to lose the fun loving ways of their puppyhood well into old age, retaining their medium to high energy levels throughout their life. They are well known for performing the “Wheaten Whirl”, a joyful spin at breakneck speed when excited and can also be very



bouncy. They are very sensitive to differing tones of voice and most try their hardest to please, so they do best with gentle, reward based types of training. Wheatens are usually a 'whole family' breed and adapt well to both city and country living as long as they are with a family who are prepared to give regular exercise, training and grooming. They are equally happy being out in a field, swimming at the beach or cuddled up on the sofa with their humans, preferring the company of their family over that of other dogs, but enjoy friendly playtimes with all sizes when out and about.

Wheatens may have begun life working for the poor crofters of Ireland, but are now a much loved family dog, thriving on close human contact. They are known for their distinctive coat and exuberant personalities, cuddling and licking family and friends to greet them, and as a lovable, friendly and outgoing breed. While they are not as fiery as most other terriers, they will certainly stand up for themselves, as their usefulness of bringing down badgers and otters would indicate, earning them an extremely good reputation in the field.

## Wheatens at Work

Apart from their original purpose of being excellent herders and vermin catchers, many Wheatens have earned excellent plaudits while working with and for humans. They are known to be used as search and rescue in disaster situations, Delta Dogs and Pets as Therapy. One dog is even currently being used as a therapy dog in ICU at the John Hunter Hospital. Wheatens do extremely well when trained for Agility, Flyball and Dock Diving and love every second of it.



## Maintenance

Apart from the aforementioned exuberance and energy which requires plenty of exercise and quality early training, the breed's stunning 'profuse and abundant' non-shedding coat is regarded as moderately high maintenance. They can go through a number of coat changes as they grow until their mature coat comes through at 3-4 years of age.

One of the most important phases of training should be preparing them for grooming. Whether they are kept trimmed short – recommended for pets as they do not tolerate heat very well, love helping with the gardening and splashing about in water - or are allowed to grow their beautiful locks, they will spend many hours on a grooming table at home and at the groomers. A daily grooming using a brush and fine tooth comb in the early years is highly recommended to not only maintain the coat knot free but to also get them used to the grooming process, including handling their feet, ears and tail. Most of them enjoy any form of water, so it's best to desensitise them against the sound and feel of a blow dryer, clippers and scissors from an early age. A clean coat is always easier to groom, so it is recommended that they are washed and conditioned at least fortnightly and trimmed on a regular basis.





## Health

The Soft Coated Wheaten is basically a very healthy dog that, given proper care and nutrition, will live a long and active life with an average lifespan of 14 years. All breeds are susceptible to inherited disease and the Wheaten is no exception.

Occurrences of protein losing nephropathy (PLN) and protein losing enteropathy (PLE), renal dysplasia (RD), Addison's disease, juvenile cataracts and degenerative myopathy (DM) have occurred in the breed, and now most breeders in this country perform ultrasounds, DNA, blood, urine and ACES tests on their breeding stock to help stamp out these diseases. It is recommended that all breeding stock are tested for the above, as well as having hips and elbows x-rayed.

## Suitability

Anyone considering owning a Wheaten should be prepared to include them as a member of the family that will participate in all aspects of family life. They are not a breed that does well as an outside living or kennel dog. Being highly intelligent Terriers, if left to their own devices for too long they quickly find ways to entertain themselves which may include gardening, furniture rearrangement or vocal objection. They do well with twice daily long walks or runs, swims at the beach and motivational toys to test their skills.

As they adore the personal interaction with their owners, a daily grooming session is often one of their favourite times. They do love their creature comforts, so most will soften even the most adamant human and find them taking their place on the sofa or bed. Their love for interaction with their family should be your highest consideration.

authors

Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier Breed Club of NSW Inc.

