

# The Irish Wolfhound

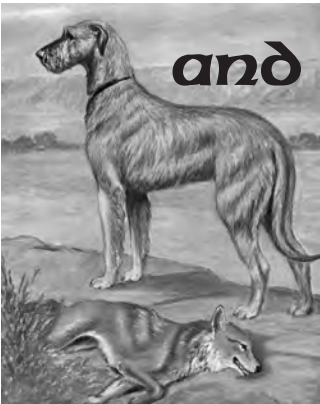


**HISTORY:** The Irish wolfhound is one of the oldest breeds, brought into Ireland by the ancient Celts. They were thought to have been war dogs—their great height enabling them to pull enemies off their horses. In Ireland, they were used to hunt wolves, singly or in pairs, which is why they were bred to such a large size. The last wolf was reputed to have been killed in 1786 and the Irish wolfhound was officially out of a job.

The Irish wolfhound had almost disappeared until, in the mid-1870's, Captain George Augustus Graham gathered what specimens were left, and by outcrossing with the great dane, Scottish deerhound and others, recreated the breed to what it is today.

**DESCRIPTION:** The Irish wolfhound is the tallest dog breed with a minimum height requirement of 32 inches at the shoulder. By comparison, the height requirement for a great dane is 30 inches. Standing on their hind legs, the IW stands between six and seven feet tall. They are part of the hound group, and are known as sighthounds because they hunt by sight, not by scent like beagles, bloodhounds or other scenthounds. They have a rough shaggy coat which comes in shades of cream, wheaten, red, grey, black, or a brindle of any of those colors. They should have longer hair, known as 'furnishings' as beards and over their eyes. They grow in height until between the ages of 2 and 3 and usually fill out from 3 to 5 years. They grow very rapidly and you can have a 100-pound 6-month old puppy who is large enough to do anything, or get hold of anything, he wants but is basically still a baby.

**WHY YOU MIGHT WANT ONE:** In general, the breed is fairly calm and easy-going. They bond strongly with their people, but can be rather aloof with those they don't know. They generally get along with other breeds. If raised with them, IWs can usually coexist with cats although an IW with a strong prey drive could quite possibly not be safe to have around cats or other small animals. They are not known to bark a lot and are very easily house-broken. By nature, they are not watchdogs, although most would defend their family if threatened.



**WHY YOU DON'T WANT ONE:** Their lifespan is, statistically, six and a half years. Though some may live to eight or, rarely, ten years or more, it's not uncommon to lose one at three to five years. Their biggest medical problems are cardiomyopathy (heart disease) and osteosarcoma (bone cancer) along with other types of cancer, pneumonia, and bloat.

Having been bred for so long to hunt on their own and make their own decisions rather than following an owner's commands, they are not the most trainable of dog breeds and you will never successfully train an Irish wolfhound using anything other than kind and positive methods. If you are looking forward to an easy-to-train, high scoring obedience dog, you'll

definitely want to look at some other breeds.

Like all puppies, IWs will chew anything they can get in their mouth. Unlike some other breeds, some IWs will never outgrow chewing. Kiss goodbye your favorite antique table. Couch cushions are history. They've been known to destroy large pieces of siding from their owner's house. You can bury a body in the holes they can dig. And needless to say, you never, ever, leave anything on a kitchen counter that you want to see again.

Although not easily trained, an IW who is not trained for things like walking nicely on a lead, or to refrain from jumping up on people, can be disastrous.

Though IWs have been kept in houses with small yards or even apartments and are regularly walked, you can see from their joyous galloping that they're happiest living where they have the ground to really run, as they were bred to do.

Being B-I-G dogs, everything is more. They eat more, there's lots more to be scooped, they shed more, vet visits may cost more, medicines cost more. Bring a couple into your house and all of a sudden, your house seems awfully small. It's much more work to groom them and bathe them and the fur tumbleweeds rolling around the house are very impressive.

*But if you've got the room—in your heart, in your home, and in your budget—and are not set on having your home or grounds as a showplace, you might find that this breed, with their soul shining through their eyes, is for you.*



For more information, go to the website of the national club - the Irish Wolfhound Club of America ([iwclubofamerica.org](http://iwclubofamerica.org)) or the regional clubs - Irish Wolfhound Association of the Delaware Valley ([iwadv.org](http://iwadv.org)) or the Irish Wolfhound Association of the Garden State ([iwags.org](http://iwags.org)).