

Let's talk about Jack Russells

LARGE PRINT VERSION

24 September 2024 | Animal Care,
Behaviour, Rescue Policy and Advice



this small breed dog makes a fantastic family pet, provided the family, including children, understand they have major sass, and are 'trained' to treat them with respect without spoiling them too much. They may stay small but they have BIG hearts and spirits!

Has your heart been stolen by a Jack Russell and you want to know if you're the right human for this breed? Maybe this blog will help you decide...

The Jack Russell is a **truly English breed** of dog, bred in Devon to be exact, and has been around in (almost) its current form for over **200 years**. Nobody is quite sure what breeds the Reverend John Russell; who was very fond of hunting; used to crossbreed them, but most think it was some kind of **Bull Terrier** and **Beagles** among others, such as the now extinct **English white 'fox working' terrier**, that were most likely. And their job unsurprisingly was fox hunting, both across fields and digging them out of their dens.



the now extinct English White Terrier

As the breed developed, the naming of them has occasionally caused confusion, in America at any rate. In the US, they were initially called a Jack Russell Terrier (Jack used to be a 'nickname' for someone called John, in case you're wondering where the 'Jack' bit came from!) by the American Kennel Club (AKC). But in 2003 the AKC changed the name to **Parson** Russell Terrier, (as their original breeder was a clergy or church man, and Parson is another name for a Reverend, though the former tended to be in charge of a smaller area, called a

parish, compared to a Reverend.). A dog breed of this name is also known in the UK. However, the Kennel Club of the United Kingdom recognise both the **Parson Russell Terrier**, their close cousin, the **Russell Terrier**, and the **Jack Russell Terrier** as different breeds, with the Jack Russell having shorter legs in proportion to their bodies than the Parson Terrier, with the Russell Terrier somewhere between the two in the leg department.

	Jack Russell Terrier breed facts
other names	none
area of origin	England
breed group	terrier
height at withers	13–14 inches (33–36 cm)
weight	13–17 pounds (6–8 kg)
life span	13–15 years
Did you know?	In 2012, for his performances in the films <i>The Artist</i> and <i>Water for Elephants</i> (both 2011), a Jack Russell named Uggie was the first dog to lay a paw print on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. He was also awarded the Palm Dog award at the Cannes film festival , which is the canine equivalent to an Academy Award .



Parson Russell Terrier

Jack Russell Terrier

Russell Terrier

Many breeds of dog were used (and to some, abused) in war time and the Jack Russell was no exception. In World War I, for example, Jack Russells, who by this time were also used for **hunting rats**, lived in the trenches with the soldiers and kept vermin away from soldiers and supplies. These dogs also brought great comfort to the soldiers. *Did we mention they have big hearts?!* It might sound weird now, but they were also used to distribute free cigarettes to the troops. Known by the soldiers as "cigarette dogs," the animals' **sensitive souls** were pulled towards soldiers who were obviously scared as they were about to go "over the top" to face the terrifying enemy machine-gun fire. So there's no doubting the **loyalty of a Jack Russell, their empathy**, or their **need to bond with a human**, which still exists in the breed to this day. This is one reason why, with the

correct training, that they can make fantastic **emotional support dogs** and even **therapy dogs**.



Usually **super smart and very affectionate**, the Jack Russell once they bond to you will usually **want to please you**, but they do this by **learning new things ‘for you’**, as well as with you, and are **naturally friendly** to all they meet, as long as their *puppyhood was full of positive socialising*, makes them likely to **form deep connections with people**.

But never forget!

They were bred to hunt and make **independent** decisions so that cute snuggle bug lying upside down on the sofa (today's Jack Russell *should not live outside*, they need their humans too much and this is also ***against our rescue policy- all our dogs need to live in the house, like the member of the family they are***) next to you can be **stubborn** and needs to be *kept engaged, walked regularly, and given jobs to do*, especially ones that encourage

their natural **curiosity and noses**.

Searching out treats, fetching stuff (but [see our blog on dogs and 'fetch'](#)), as well as even more strenuous activities like agility and flyball courses will keep their minds busy and not digging up your flowerbeds!

They usually have a lot of **stamina** for a small breed dog and will thrive on long walks. And usually beware of pairing them in homes with small furries because of their **prey drive** that humans bred into them, though if brought up with cats can usually live very happily with a cat. So if your ideal dog is one that gets you **regularly out and about**, and usually the centre of attention from people they meet, look no further than the Jack Russell Terrier.



[A lovely Jack boy in full flow on a flyball course](#)

Grooming

Grooming is a great way to bond with any new dog and Jack Russells are no exception. Our [grooming blog](#) has some great tips on this!

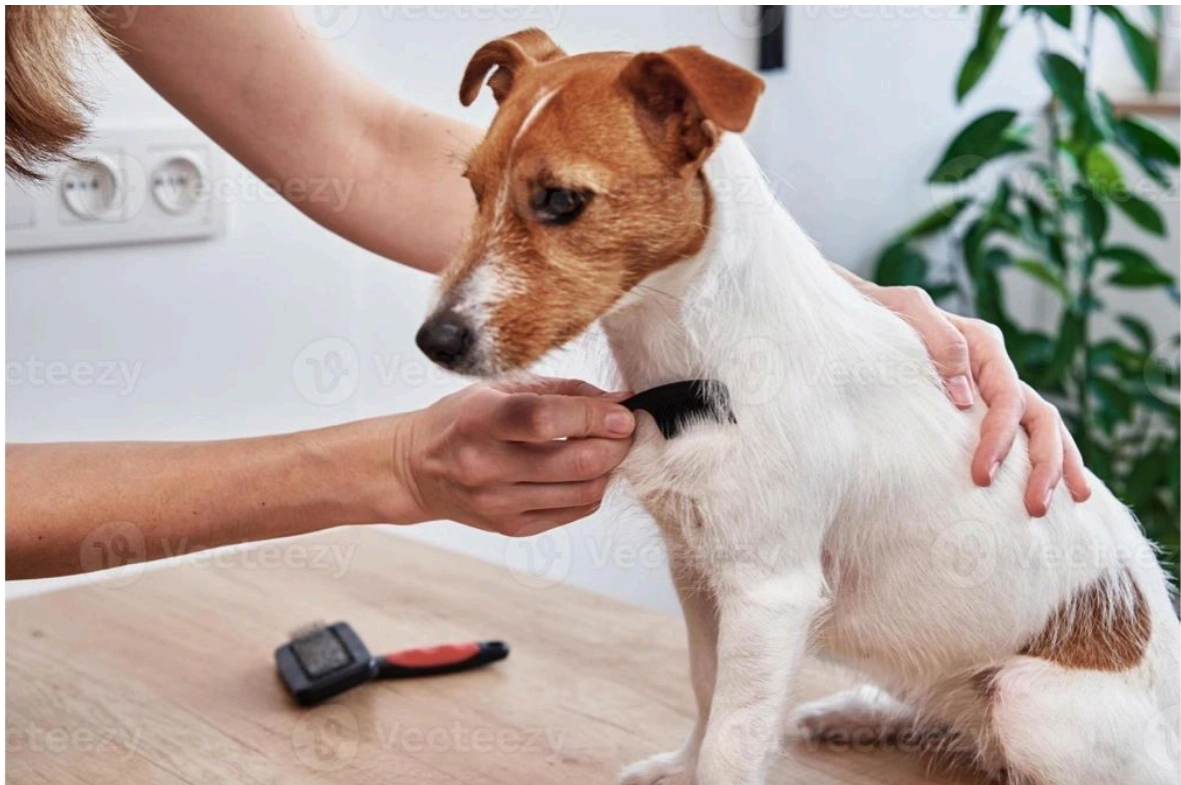
They can have rough or smooth coats, or a mixture of the two. But no matter

whether they're 'wire haired' or not, a good **brushing at least once a week**, especially during the moulting seasons is the best plan. A shedding brush or comb could be a good investment! But *not too many baths* as that strips essential oils from their coats. Unless they love a roll or a mud puddle, a **bath every 3 months** or so should suffice.

Much like the Border Terrier, Jack Russells with wiry coats may need 'hand stripping' to remove dead hair or undercoat- if you're not sure if your Jack needs this, it might be worth visiting a professional groomer to get some advice.

Like all dogs, their **teeth will need to be checked** regularly and regular brushing to prevent gum disease; or *raw feeding 80 10 10 that has good bone content* as it also cleans teeth, as well as meat treats like tripe sticks; rather than biscuits; they act as natural toothbrushes for any dog.

It's a good idea to introduce them feeling comfortable about you checking in their mouths as a part of your new dog's routine early, as it'll help familiarise them with the process and it will be reminiscent of their mum checking them over and feeding them when they were puppies so done right could *help them feel safe*.



Training a Jack Russell

With ***consistent and positive reinforcement*** (for more on this [see our blog](#)) your Jack can be a happy, obedient (as they love to do jobs!) and content fluff ball always ready to follow you on any adventure. Their **usually confident nature and comedy genius moments** makes them a joy to be around, once they know you're not going to be wrapped around their fluffy finger (paw?!). So you need **confident body language** when training a Jack, and to know when your Jack is stressed (for more on this, do [read our blog here](#)) to get a healthy relationship going and they'll love you to the moon and back! And the time and effort you put into training them, you'll get loyalty and joy back from them a hundred times over...



Contrary to popular belief, a Jack Russell is often a cuddle bug but don't mistake that for being a lap dog!

Top training tips

1. **Be clear** in what you want them to do. Like with all dogs, use simple tasks and commands at first, using **two or three keywords including a time frame** for the task, such as 'wait here a mo' or 'come on now' then combine tasks to make them more complex as time goes on, like asking them to wait till you've stashed treats round the house or garden, then having a 'release command' like 'off you go' to let them

know it's now the time to run full pelt searching for those tasty treats! More clues on **command words and tones you use, which are very important for any dog** you adopt, can be found in [this blog](#)

2. If they divert away from a task due to their *natural excitability or lack of experience, be prepared to start the task again* from scratch. If there's a 'loophole' in your commands, a Jack will find them and it's up to you to make sure those loopholes are closed, and they know what you want and need them to do. **Use their intelligence** well and they'll be the happiest dogs on the planet!
3. Jack Russells are **not lapdogs**, despite their super loving nature. Spoil them at your peril. Give them a reason to want the treat, or that play tug with you, or that walk. And keep your **rules and boundaries constant**. If you don't want them on the sofa, never let them up,

even when you're out. For a Jack, doing something once becomes a habit.

4. They think they are big dogs, and have few small dog traits. They **won't need coats or booties** unless the weather is very extreme usually, like a lot of small breed dogs, for example. Their coats may be short but they are usually pretty thick, and could feel confined and uncomfortable dressed in 'clothes'.

They'll usually go for hours on walks despite their little legs, unlike a lot of small breed dogs, too.

5. Walk train them very carefully with clear and simple commands. Use a training field or large garden and lots of long lead work to get them ready for their adventures. They can be chasers (again, we humans bred them that way) so **offlead work needs to be careful and reinforced** with clear commands every time you go out. They can and will recall, but you have to **make it 'interesting'** enough to want to come

back to you. If their noses are engaged and they're on the trail even that treat in your pocket will not be enough to bring them back, so ***never rely on treat training for recall work.*** Treat training outdoors is just too vague for a Jack. Make sure what you want them to do and what they want to do meets in the middle, and **make it fun** for a harmonious working (and walking!) relationship!

6. Make sure they **sleep after learning a new job, to process** it. And if they bounce back up after half an hour, make sure they know they need to go back to bed, even to rest, for a good while longer. (We recommend ***post-job rest for 3 times the length of the job they've done*** - if you've done ten minutes of training on a job for example, they will need to go to their beds for a good half an hour. They can have a comfort soft toy with them for this, but not an activity toy unless they're very

bouncy still post task. Then an activity toy such as a ball or rope can **burn off some energy while not running around** and divert them to resting while engaging with something. (For more on toys, [see this blog](#)). But they need to go to their beds to do it, and **not be fussed or bothered when they are in their beds**. *Beds are for sleeping, chilling and restful energy burning tasks while being still only* and need to be in a space where they can see you, but aren't on a path through the house you need to use a lot to go to the kitchen or bathroom. For a Jack, **resting is mental exercise that can tire them out** and help them sleep even more than a two hour walk. And ***sleep is vital to all dogs for a healthy mindset***, check out our [sleep blog](#) for more info!

7. They are bred to alert their humans to danger. Shouting at them to shut up will not work, they will think you are alerting

too and will have a conversation with you! There's *no point getting annoyed when they bark, as humans bred them* to show their people that things are happening that the humans need to check out. The best way is **not to ignore them** as they'll get frustrated, **but use softer lower tones to calm** them, go and check the window or door or whatever they're barking at and use a phrase like 'nothing there' or 'not to worry' and *direct them to their beds to rest as they've finished their job* (in this case, alerting.)



like many terriers, Jacks may like an open

bed; or a tunnel bed (in the picture) or a 'cave bed' to burrow into for comfort, or to satisfy a breed need to 'tunnel'.

Like any 'pure bred' dog, Jack Russells can be prone to certain conditions:

- Luxating patellas – the kneecaps slipping temporarily out of place.
- Primary Lens Luxation – a painful condition which causes blindness.
- Late Onset Ataxia – a condition which causes loss of balance and lack of coordination with gradually worsens. There is no treatment available for this disease.
- Spinocerebellar Ataxia – a disease which causes the spinal cord to degenerate. No treatment is available for this disease.
- Leggs Perthes disease- a painful condition that causes the hip joint to crumble and collapse. Surgery and

physiotherapy is currently the only known effective treatment for this.

Of course, these conditions are far **more likely in a 'pedigree' back yard breeder dog**, as the parents are meant to be screened for these conditions; and such 'greeders' can't be bothered with the expense of these tests; and **less likely in a rescue dog** as they can end up in rescue due to an accidental pregnancy and may not be 100% Jack no matter how much they look like one. Any **reputable rescue who has Jacks or Jack mixes will ensure they are well socialised and properly vet checked** before they go home as well, unlike a backyard breeder.

JACK RUSSELL TERRIER COLOURS AVAILABLE



1. WHITE & TAN



2. WHITE & RED



3. WHITE I



4. WHITE 2



5. WHITE & BROWN



6. WHITE & BROWN 2



7. WHITE & BLACK



8. TRI COLOR 1



9. TRI COLOR 2

A typical Jack is usually white and tan. But other colour combinations can naturally occur as well!

Do also note that a Jack can **end up** in **rescue** because they or their mum has

failed ‘hunting dog tests’ and can’t be bothered with or don’t see the point chasing after ‘vermin’ or prey animals. So don’t expect all Jacks to want to do ‘typical terrier’ jobs like fetch, or they may even be scared of, or super friendly with small animals especially if they have been around them since they were a puppy-friends, not food!



FURTHER READING

Background and info on Jack

Russells [https://www.britannica.com/](https://www.britannica.com/animal/Jack-Russell-terrier#:~:text=The%20breed%20loves%20to%20wander,left%20alone%20with%20such%20animals.)

[animal/Jack-Russell-](https://www.britannica.com/animal/Jack-Russell-terrier#:~:text=The%20breed%20loves%20to%20wander,left%20alone%20with%20such%20animals.)

[terrier#:~:text=The%20breed%20loves%20to%20wander,left%20alone%20with%20such%20animals.](https://www.britannica.com/animal/Jack-Russell-terrier#:~:text=The%20breed%20loves%20to%20wander,left%20alone%20with%20such%20animals.)

Jacks as ESDs (emotional support dogs) [https://](https://www.emotionalpetsupport.com/the-jack-russell-terrier-an-exceptional-service-animal/)

www.emotionalpetsupport.com/the-jack-russell-terrier-an-exceptional-service-animal/

Grooming a Jack <https://www.groomers-online.com/how-to-groom-a-jack-russell-i249>

On how dogs were and are to this day trained for war [https://](https://science.howstuffworks.com/war-dog.htm#:~:text=In%20World%20War%20I%2C%20Jack,away%20from%20soldiers%20and%20supplies.)

science.howstuffworks.com/war-dog.htm#:~:text=In%20World%20War%20I%2C%20Jack,away%20from%20soldiers%20and%20supplies.

More Jack Russell facts and

advice [https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-](https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/looking-after-your-pet/puppies-dogs/small-dogs/jack-russell-)

[and-advice/looking-after-your-pet/puppies-dogs/small-dogs/jack-russell-](https://www.pdsa.org.uk/pet-help-and-advice/looking-after-your-pet/puppies-dogs/small-dogs/jack-russell-)

[terrier#:~:text=Common%20health%20problems%20in%20Jack%20Russell%20Terriers,-](#)

[Jack%20Russells%20are&text=Some%20of%20the%20conditions%20Jack,should%20be%20screened%20before%20breeding.](#)

More on training <https://thejackrussell.co.uk/how-to-train-a-jack-russell-terrier/>