

Norfolk Terrier Grooming Standards

Find out what the appropriate style is for this breed at American and European competitions.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. Having viewed the DogChannel website, I am writing you for advice on hand-stripping my female Norfolk Terrier. My question is in particular relation to the “skirt.” Is there a requirement to have a skirt on each side? I have also been informed recently by an individual competing in a show here in Ireland that the sides should be tapered under the belly; therefore you would not have a skirt on either side, which is how I’ve had the coat displayed at previous shows. My Norfolk Terrier is 2½ years old and I show her approximately 10 to 12 times a year.

A. According to the American Kennel Club (AKC) standard, the Norfolk Terrier does not really have a skirt. Its underbelly furnishings are a bit longer than its body, but I would describe their appearance as slightly rounded rather than tapered as you have recently been advised. While I believe the same grooming standard pertains under The English or United Kennel Club rules, in which you would be showing, it would be wise to check out your regulating club’s published standard. Attending dog shows to educate yourself on what judges like to see in your breed’s grooming is another helpful idea.

In my experience, the Norfolk’s undercarriage — the bottom line extending from beneath the chest to the tuck-up area — is shaped to match the general outline of its sturdy compact body; gently rounded to follow the body contour and completely natural in appearance. It should never have a distinct pattern line delineating one body area from another. A long skirt hanging beneath this short-legged hunting terrier would be impractical in the field as the dog tunneled underground or drove through rough brambles in pursuit of prey.

As you mentioned, its naturally coarse coat is preserved by hand-stripping. Its hard texture is the dog’s body armor when pursuing vermin or backing up hounds in flushing quarry. The coat would soften and lose its protective quality if this dog was shaved. Any trimming to shape the Norfolk should be done very subtly with thinning shears.

The smallest of the working terriers at approximately 12 pounds, the Norfolk Terrier’s wiry coat comes in shades of red, wheaten, grizzle, or black and tan. Originally hailing from the county of Norfolk just north of London, its function as a hard-working pack hunter is underscored by the fact that in the show ring, “honorable scars from wear and tear” are permissible.

Until 1979, the breed was shown with either the “prick” (erect and pointed) ear or the forward-folding, gently rounded “drop” ear. Complying with the change made 10 years earlier by the English Kennel Club, the AKC then separated the drop-eared variety as the Norfolk Terrier and its prick-eared counterpart as the Norwich (pronounced “Noritch”) Terrier. My way of remembering which is which goes like this: The “witch’s” hat is pointed up and you put your “fork” down.

Left unstripped, the Norfolk’s coat will grow full and bushy. If you are fortunate enough to have the guidance of an experienced breeder or handler, you will learn the proper schedule of hand-stripping for your particular dog called “rolling the coat” to keep new hair continually growing in as her old hair is removed. In addition to stripping, done either with the fingers or a stripping knife, frequent brushing is required to maintain coat luster and keep the undercoat from building up into tight pockets. While most Norfolk fanciers prefer a natural bristle brush, a metal-bristled slicker brush will also work well.

Remember that your Norfolk’s coat should be no longer than one or two inches with her distinctive neck ruff left a bit fuller. While this dog’s underpinnings and legs are slightly longer than the rest of its body, the Norfolk’s overall silhouette is a well-muscled dog with naturally rounded lines and no obvious trimming. In other words, no flowing coat. This is not a fancy toy terrier, but a hunter whose original function and gregarious nature should trump fussy or fancy styling.