

## Meet the Breed: Friendly Fluff Balls

**Few can resist the charms of the cheerful Bichon Frise.**

*Stephanie Horan*

With its button-black eyes, sparkling white coat, and mischievous personality, the Bichon Frise is a friendly and outgoing charmer, and has become a popular companion dog in many countries. "They are the standard of a lapdog," says Carol Haines of Carol Stream, Ill., who has owned these sweet and playful little dogs for more than 20 years.

### European roots

The Bichon family of small dogs originated in the Mediterranean area of Europe several centuries ago. The Barbet (a type of water spaniel), together with a family of small, mostly white lapdogs that existed at the same time, was the ancestor of four similar types of dog, which became known as "Barbichon," later shortened to "Bichon." The four types took the names Bichon Maltais, Bichon Bolognais, Bichon Havanais and Bichon Tenerife.

These little dogs were of cheerful disposition, and often traveled to other continents with sailors who bartered goods. It's thought that Spanish seamen took them to Tenerife, the largest of the Canary Islands. Italian sailors probably brought them back to the mainland in the 1300s, and they became popular with Italian nobility.

The Bichon Tenerife became extremely popular in France and Spain in the late 16th century. Many painters in Spain's Royal Academy of Fine Art included them in their work, particularly Francisco Goya (1746 to 1828). The breed's popularity among the nobility waned in later years, and it became a common street dog throughout France. Its athletic ability and cheerful demeanor endeared it to peddlers, and the dogs were often used by organ grinders and other street performers because they easily learned tricks, charming crowds at circuses and fairs. The Bichons danced on their hind legs and begged from the crowds, delighting spectators. This cheerful attitude is now an established trait in the breed.

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