

Popular Dogs: Yorkshire Terriers

Discover the breed characteristics of the Yorkshire Terrier.

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To all outward appearances, your Yorkshire Terrier seems harmless: too charming to overlook, but too miniscule to take seriously. Believe this at your peril. Once a Yorkie enters your home, the place is his. He soon will have the entire family bowing and scraping (literally!). Many of us already know this firsthand, but what some of us are not yet aware of is that these tiny dogs are planning on taking over the entire world.

Don't believe me? While nobody was paying attention, for example, the Yorkie has made a silent but steady ascent up the ladder on the American Kennel Club's registration lists. Half a century or so ago, the Yorkie ranked 57th among the 112 breeds, but by 1970, the breed had climbed to 17th place. By 1980, he was up to No. 11, and broke into the top 10 in 1995. Today, the formidable toy terrier ranks No. 2, behind only the perennial Labrador Retriever. But Labs had better watch out, because Yorkies are about to bite 'em in the butts. Metaphorically speaking, of course.

The idea of Yorkies taking over the world is, in a way, a comforting one. The Yorkie is beautiful, courageous, sociable, hyper-sophisticated and super intelligent. If any dog deserves to own the planet, it's surely this one. Let's take a look at the Yorkshire Terrier's 13-step program for taking over.

Step 1: Distract the owner with extreme cuteness.

While the human is oohing and aahing over the adorable mite, the tiny terror (I meant "terrier," of course) is using his magical powers to receive extra treats, a special place on the bed or a diamond necklace in place of the cheap rhinestone one originally purchased. Tap water will and must be replaced by Perrier. As for ordinary dog food -- forget it. Yorkies prefer lean cuts of home-prepared beef, salmon and chicken, with fresh grilled veggies on the side.

Step 2: Smother with hair.

Although the Yorkshire Terrier is tiny, he magically produces more hair than a Newfoundland in the dead of winter. However, Yorkies do not shed, and that's part of their magic. Still, they can and will manage to tangle or mat up their luxuriant and silky hair at a moment's notice, forcing the owner to spend hours grooming or having it cut to a sensible length. (If you decide to try for the long coat, it is essential that the part is even. Yorkies cannot abide a crooked part.) Most Yorkies seem to enjoy the bows their owners insist on decorating them with, as long as the colors complement their hair. Some people have no taste in this matter.

Step 3: Misdirect the human's attention.

The Yorkie is well-versed in the art of slight-of-paw. Notably, he is able to use his skills in misdirection to disorient the human about how many terriers he or she actually owns. Many Yorkshire Terrier owners thought they had only one Yorkie, only to discover later that they had four of them. Or vice versa.

Those old enough to remember the original Star Trek TV series may recall the incredibly cute tribbles, which looked suspiciously like Yorkshire Terrier puppies, and which eventually took over the Starship Enterprise. That's what will happen at your house -- even if you only have one Yorkie. (Be forewarned: Nearly everyone who gets one Yorkshire Terrier eventually gets two -- and so on. They are so small and active, it's hard to keep count.)

Step 4: Start barking.

Yorkies are sometimes accused of being "yappy." They are not yappy. They are engaged in a carefully planned (and high-pitched) tactic to get what they want. Nor do they bark all the time, as detractors claim. Yorkies bark only when: (a) intruders approach, (b) it's dinnertime, (c) it's near dinnertime, (d) they think it's near dinnertime, (e) they want to be petted, (f) they want to go out, (g) they want to play, (h) they want you to come home, (i) they want you to throw the cat off your lap so they can sit there, or (j) they want something else, and who knows what the heck it is? The important thing is that Yorkies like to keep you guessing.

The Yorkshire Terrier has perfectly calibrated his barking to a pitch that's precisely unbearable to human ears when continued for more than five seconds. The Yorkie employs this method to obtain his desires when more subtle clues like staring, nudging and peeing on the floor seem to escape the owner's notice.

Step 5: Manipulate the other pets.

Yorkshire Terriers are smarter than most other dogs, and usually can manage to get someone else blamed for things they do themselves. "It couldn't have been the Yorkie," thinks the naïve owner, gazing with dismay at the ripped curtains, unrolled toilet paper and chewed-up couch. "She's too tiny to make a mess this big." The Lab gets in trouble instead, and the Yorkie snickers up his silky sleeve. The Labrador just looks guilty.

Step 6: Convince the owner that he is impossible to houstrain.

Almost every Yorkie book and website warns owners that the little dogs are a challenge to houstrain. Well, maybe, but the true reason is seldom given. Yorkshire Terriers find outdoor toilet facilities demeaning and prefer to eliminate in the house, same as their owners. You can solve the problem quite easily by providing an indoor doggie litter box, preferably encrusted with jewels, or by using the outdoors yourself, so the dog doesn't feel so self-conscious.

Step 7: Complain about the cold.

Because they only have a single coat (not double coated like other breeds), most Yorkies hate cooler weather, and owners try to compensate by buying or knitting charming dog sweaters and booties for their darlings. These are better than nothing, especially if they are designer-made, but the most advanced Yorkies manage to convince their humans to buy a winter home in Bermuda or Hawaii. They prefer beachfront property, as long as it is near high-end shopping. In Bermuda, the little dogs can wear their bikinis.

Step 8: Take over family planning.

Many Yorkshire Terriers are leery of small, loud, bumbling children, who have been known to tease or fall on these little dogs. In response to that unsatisfactory state of affairs, some Yorkies have managed to convince their owners that a child-free relationship is better for everyone. Someone I knew refused to consider having a baby "until Twitters passes away," as she said. Being a member of a long-lived breed, Twitters hung on until he was 18, and my friend's biological clock stopped ticking. So she and her husband got another Yorkie.

Step 9: Fake being a watchdog.

Yorkies are renowned for their alertness, and most family members fondly believe that the Yorkie is warning them of dangers. Wrong. The Yorkie aims to keep everyone out -- both friend and foe. And they don't care what the neighbors think, either.

Part of the Yorkie's diabolical world takeover plot is to isolate his family from the outside world, so that you soon will have no friends or anywhere to turn when the inevitable happens, and you are begging your terrier for a scrap of food or the corner of the bed.

Don't get your hopes up. Yorkies are not known for their compassion. But they do have a sense of humor. In a famous incident, two Yorkshire Terriers leapt to the aid of their elderly owner when she was accosted by a flasher. The Yorkies leapt up and bit the man where it hurt the most. Yorkies not only are brave, but they also are terribly offended by lewd behavior.

They also are fearless where other dogs are concerned. A Yorkie named Oliver broke out of his own house and raced across the street to distract an insane Akita who was attacking an elderly lady. He distracted the huge dog long enough for the victim to make a getaway and suffered some injury himself before he was able to scamper to safety under a car. He received eight stitches and a lot of praise for his courage. There truly is no braver dog than the Yorkshire Terrier.

For another real Yorkie hero, one has to look no further than Smokey, a decorated World War II dog who took baths in her owner's, Army Corporal Bill Wynne, helmet. (Even on a New Guinea battlefield, a true-blooded Yorkie insists on cleanliness.) Found in a fox-hole, she participated in 12 air-sea rescues and lived through 150 bombardments. It was never clear where she came from originally, since she refused to answer commands in either English or Japanese. Perhaps they forgot to say "please." The dog actually helped build Allied airfields by dragging wires through narrow culverts

no one else could get through. Smokey was later voted "Mascot of the South Pacific," and finished her career by traveling around the world demonstrating her tricks -- she could walk a tight wire blindfolded.

Step 10: Be portable.

Nothing pleases the adventurous Yorkie more than being where the action is, which is seldom at home. It's not an accident that the Yorkshire Terrier is so small. Being little is part of the big plan. The Yorkie is so small that you have no excuse not to carry him along with you wherever you go, even into places that are usually forbidden to lesser breeds. (Most toy breeds hate being "boarded out," and Yorkies are probably tops in this category. They also are not crazy about being left on their own, so you basically have no choice. The Yorkie has made sure of that.) And once you're in that fancy restaurant or high-class boutique, who is going to be cold-hearted enough to kick you out? Not with that adorable little dog, who's busy distracting the proprietor with his cuteness. Eventually, the dog will be attached to your hip and you'll be unable to leave without him even in the unlikely event that you should wish to.

Step 11: Be nice.

The Yorkshire's Terrier's ability to get along with other pets, including cats and larger dogs, makes him an easy addition to anyone's home. And that's part of the plan, of course. Almost everyone has room for a least one Yorkie, and before you know it, people own a dozen of them and nothing else. Don't worry, your Yorkie will be very friendly with all the other pets while he is easing them out of your heart and home. As a favor, he may also de-mouse your house, mostly because he can't stand sharing his living quarters with rodents.

Step 12: Get bored.

Yorkies are so intelligent that they bore easily, and that means they require a great deal of slavish attention from their owners to keep them entertained. The captivated owner can play games with them or even enlist them in a sport that's laughably known as "obedience." Yorkies are quite good at this endeavor, so long as they are given treats, toys and other rewards every step of the way. They also excel at agility, although they tend to negotiate the jumps in the order they prefer, rather than the one "ordered" by the owner. The result, however, is that all the spectators gather around and say, "Oh, how sweet!" Thus, the sneaky terrier ropes in more slavish admirers while still doing precisely as he pleases. Of course, Yorkies excel in the show ring, where they simply float by their competition.

However, one should be aware that every Yorkie thinks he should win every class and if he doesn't, he is liable to take it out on you, and demand more toys and costly items of apparel.

Step 13: Replace the remaining family members in the owner's heart.

Everyone who has a Yorkie falls deeply and irrevocably in love. Husbands, parents and even children soon take second, third and fourth place in the Yorkie owner's affection. Soccer games are missed to take the dog to the beauty parlor. Anniversaries are forgotten because the Yorkie needs a new sweater. Family vacations are skipped because the Yorkie doesn't want to stay in a kennel. Important children's vaccinations are omitted because there is only enough money for one family member to be up to date on shots.

A friend of mine had just gotten a charming Yorkie as a birthday present for her husband. As she was driving home, she passed an ancient Navajo woman walking along and gave her lift. For a long time the woman remained silent, but finally asked my friend what was in the crate. "It's a Yorkshire Terrier puppy," my friend explained. "I got it for my husband." The woman was quiet for another minute, staring at the puppy. At last she solemnly pronounced, "Good trade."