

Poodle Colors, Patterns, and Disqualifiers



Brought to you by the United Poodle Association

Coat of Many Colors

- Poodles historically come in a wide variety of colors and patterns. In the early 1900s, solid colors became most popular, and in 1932, when the Poodle Club of America created the AKC poodle standard, they only included solid-colored poodles. For many years, multi-colored puppies were hidden or even culled when born. Today, many people don't know that poodles come in anything other than solid colors. The patterned poodles, although low in numbers for decades, have found their way back into favor with many poodle fanciers. Beautiful multi-color puppies are readily available from health tested, titled parents today. These patterned, or multi-colored poodles, are eligible for AKC registration and may title in any AKC performance sport.
- Their rise in popularity has not yet prompted a change in the AKC standard, and "non-solid" colors are still disqualified from AKC conformation. Multi-colored poodles are able to compete and title in conformation in the United Kennel Club.
- Standard poodles are in the Gun Dog group in UKC, in comparison to the Non-Sporting group in AKC. They are judged on correct structure and the ability to do the sporting jobs for which they were bred. Minimum grooming is required for this purpose and no hair products are allowed. Toy and miniature poodles are in the Companion group in the UKC, but are held to the same criteria as standard poodles.

Solid Colors

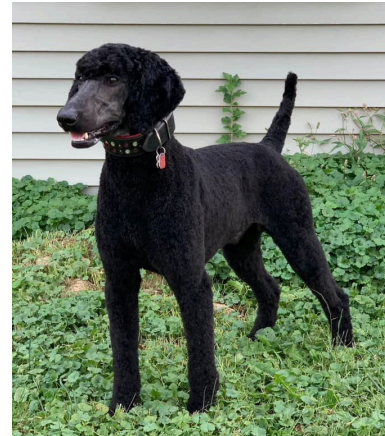
- Black
- Blue
- Gray
- Silver
- Brown
- Café Au Lait
- Silver Beige
- Red
- Apricot
- Cream
- White

Solid color poodles are described as any solid color or varying shades of the same color. They will be a solid color at the skin. If they are affected by the progressive graying gene, their color will vary as it changes from the darker puppy color to their final adult shade. For example, the transition from black to silver happens gradually so the coat will naturally have varying shades from black to silver. Solid colored dogs with progressive graying, may also have darker pigmented hair in areas where the skin was damaged, the hair grew back in the darker puppy color, and will need to clear again. These natural variations are not considered a fault. *See slide 22 for more on injury discoloration.*



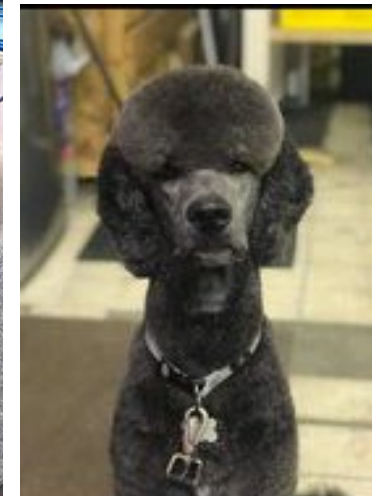
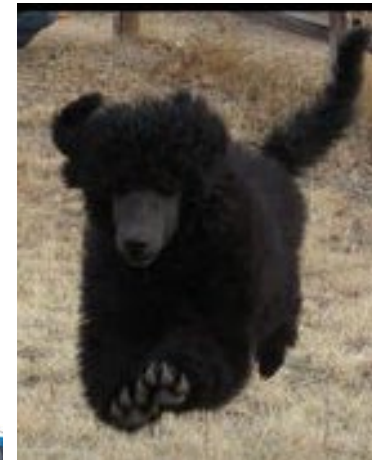
Black

Black poodles are born black and may remain an inky black their entire lives. They are not affected by progressive graying, but may lighten a bit or have some white hairs as they age. They are solid colored at the skin, and have very dark eyes, black nose, eye rims, lips, and nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



Blue /Gray

Blue or gray poodles are born black. They are affected by the progressive graying gene, and will fade to a blue/gray color by around 2 years of age. Varying shades of the same color are not considered a fault. Darker pigmented areas where the skin was damaged, the hair grew back in the original puppy color, and needs to clear again, are not considered a fault. They have very dark eyes, black nose, eye rims, lips, and black nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



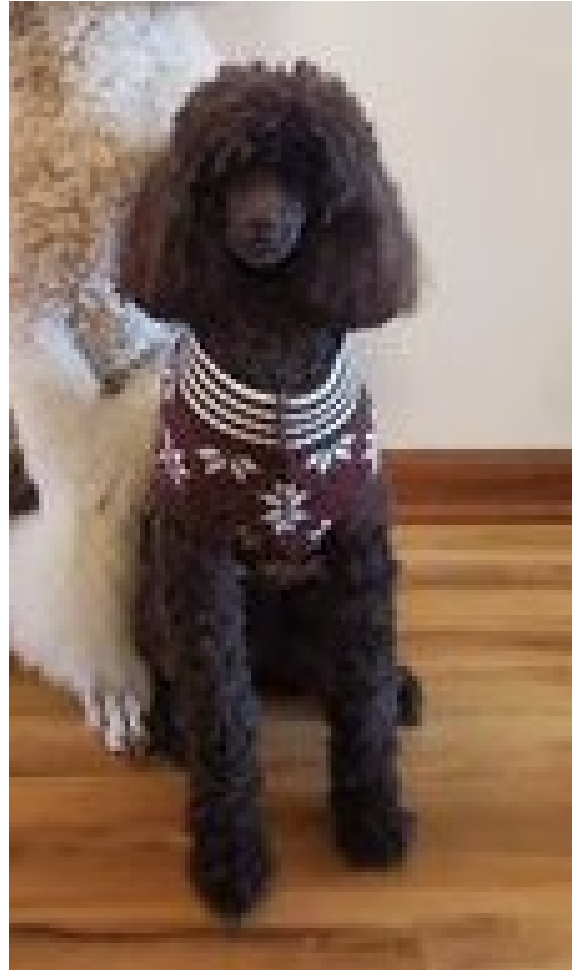
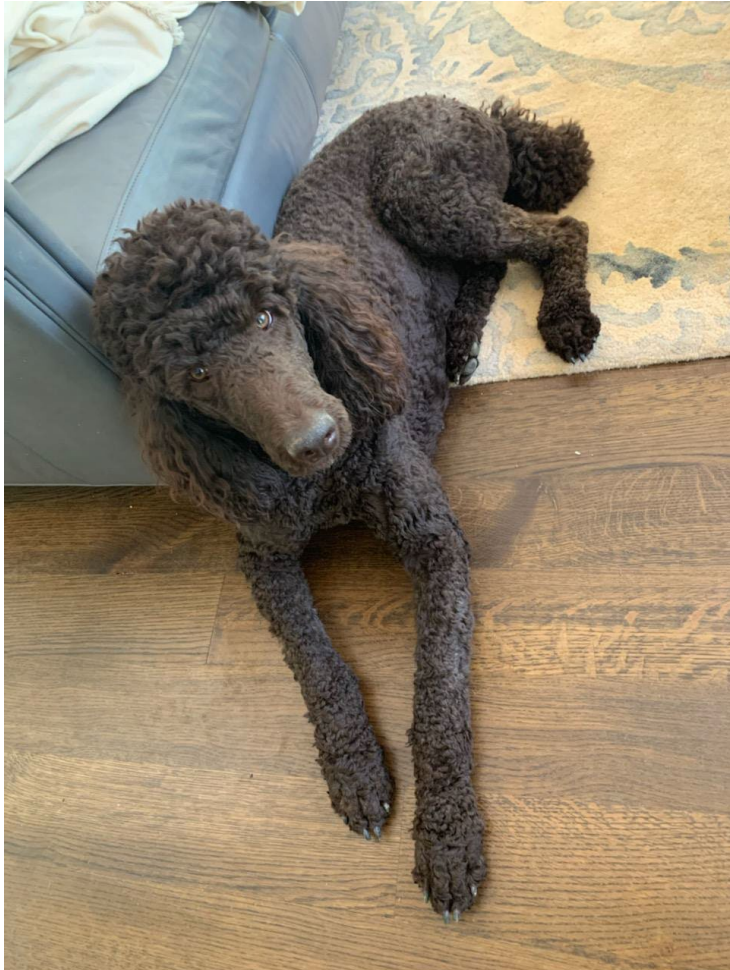
Silver

Silver poodles are born black. They are affected by progressive graying and their body color will clear to their silver adult shade by approximately 2 years of age. They will naturally have varying shades of the same color during this process. As other progressive graying colors, they are prone to injury coloration in areas of skin damage. This is normal and not considered a fault. They must have very dark eyes, black nose, eye rims, lips, and black nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



Brown

Brown poodles are born darker brown and remain dark brown throughout their lives. They are not affected by progressive graying, although they may fade a bit or have some white hairs as they age. They are solid colored at the skin. They may have dark amber eyes, liver nose, eye rims, lips, and dark nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



Café Au Lait

Café Au Lait poodles are born darker brown, and will fade to a “coffee with cream” color by around 2 years of age. Varying shades of the same color as they are clearing is not considered a fault. Darker pigmented areas where the skin was damaged, the hair grew back in the original puppy color, and needs to clear again, are not considered a fault. They may have dark amber eyes, liver nose, eye rims, lips, and dark nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



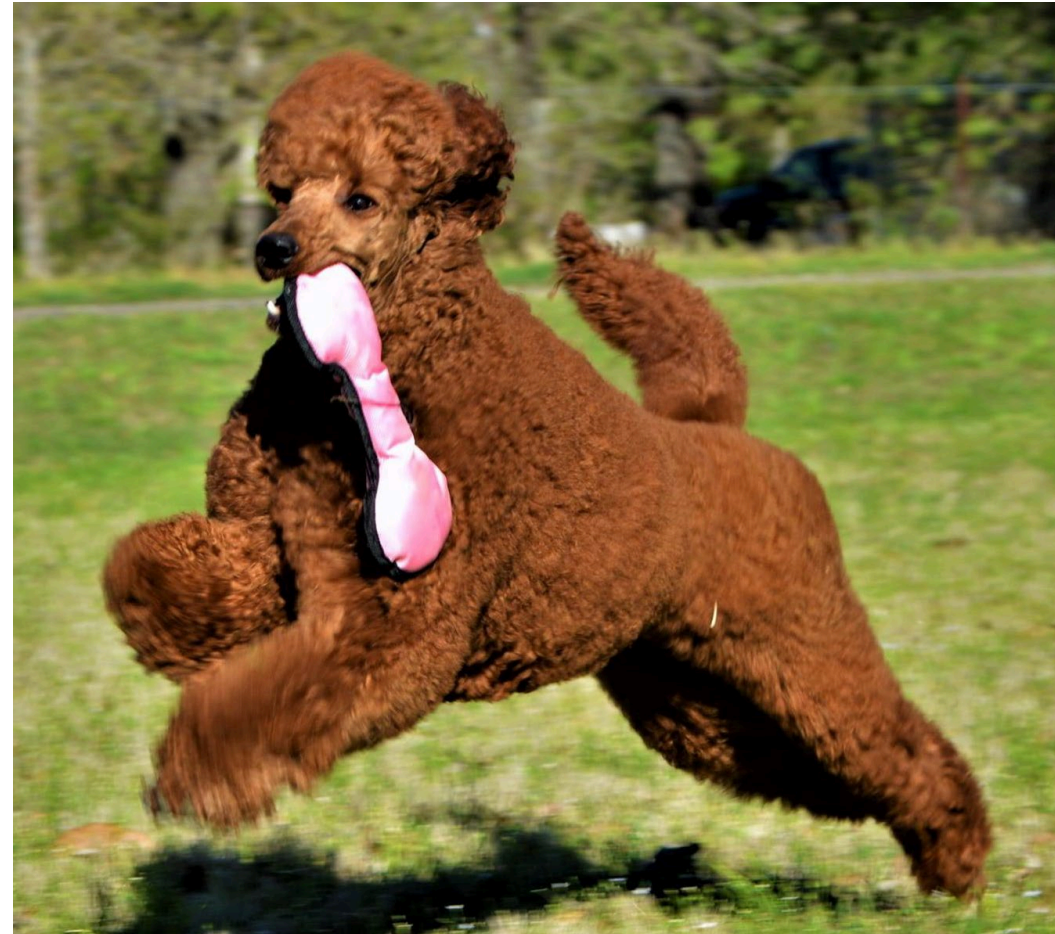
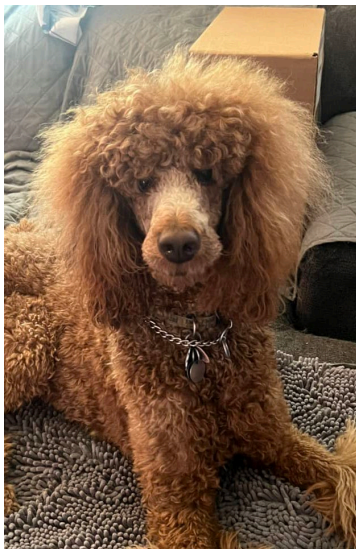
Silver Beige

Silver beige poodles are born darker brown. Their hair color will clear to their adult shade by the approximate age of 2. They will have varying shades of the same color during this time. Darker pigmented areas where the skin was damaged, the hair grew back in the original puppy color, and needs to clear again, are not considered a fault. They may have dark amber eyes, liver nose, eye rims, lips, and dark nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



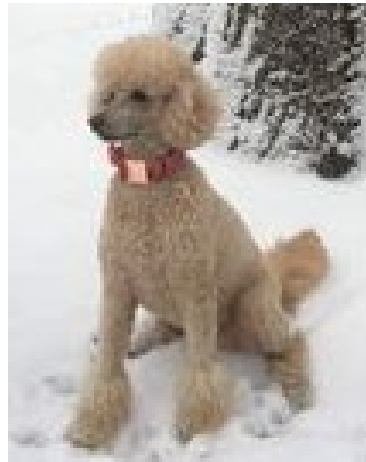
Red

Red poodles are born red and may remain a dark red their entire lives. They are not affected by progressive graying, although they may lighten a bit or have some white hairs as they age. They are solid colored at the skin. They may have dark amber eyes, liver nose, eye rims and lips, although black is preferred. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



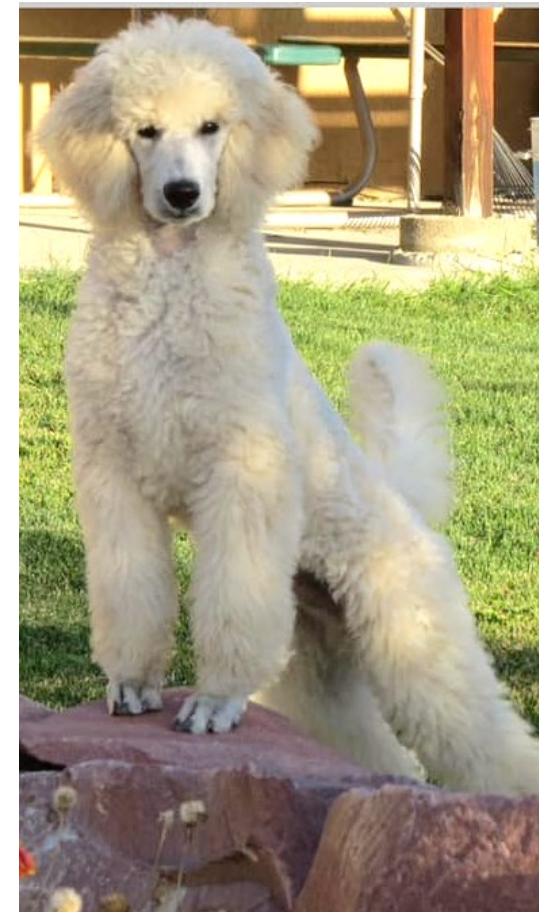
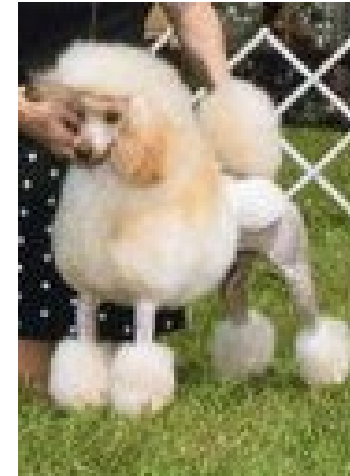
Apricot

Apricot poodles may be born a light red or darker apricot color and lighten over time. Varying shades of the same color are not considered a fault. They may have dark amber eyes, liver nose, eye rims, and lips, although black is preferred. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



Cream

Cream poodles may be born an apricot or cream color and lighten over time. Varying shades of the same color are not considered a fault. They may have a darker cream in the ears while young. They must have dark eyes, black noses, eye rims, lips; and dark nails. The UKC standard allows for a few barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes to show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



White

White poodles may be born white or a light cream color and lighten as they age. They may have some light cream in their ears while young. They must have dark eyes, black noses, eye rims, lips, and dark nails. Varying shades of the same color are not considered a fault.



Multi-Coloreds

- Parti
- Abstract
- Sable
- Phantom
- Brindle
- Brindle
Pointed
Phantom

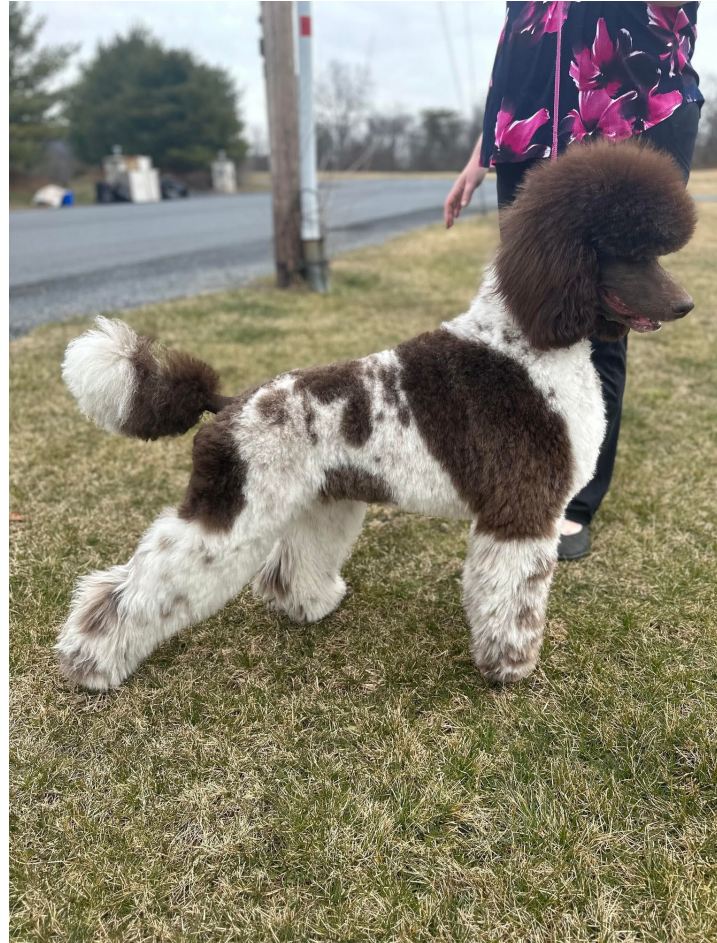
Multi-colored poodles come in a variety of colors, patterns, and combinations. Due to progressive graying, mutations such as low expression, shaded sable, as well as having a combination of patterns (multi-patterned), the multi-colored poodle seems to come in unlimited color options.



Parti-colored with Solid Colors

Parti-colored poodles are at least 50 percent white, with spots or patches of any other acceptable solid or patterned color. Full or partial saddles are acceptable. Ticking in the white of the coat is acceptable.

The examples on this slide are of parti-colored with solid colors.



Parti-colored with Patterns (Multi- patterned)

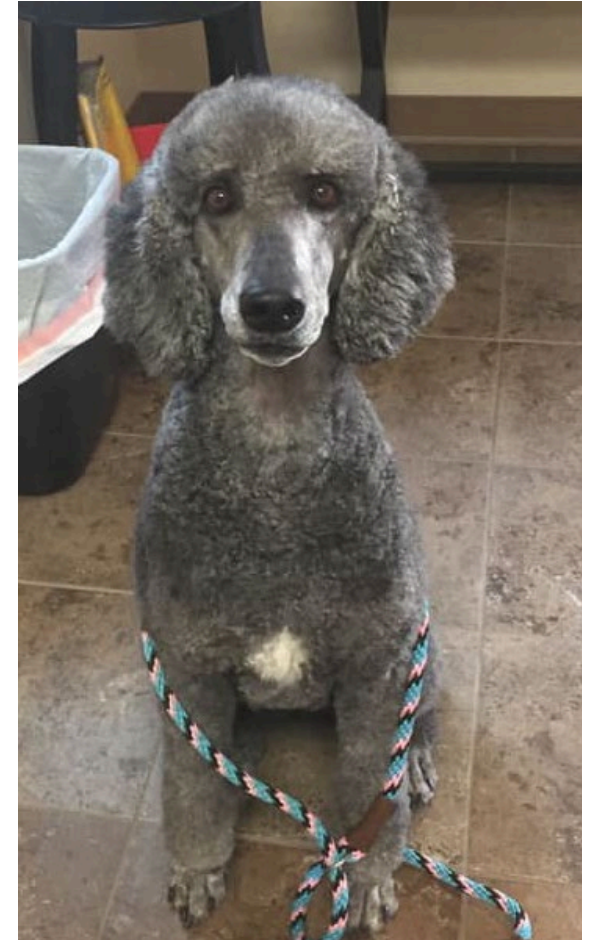
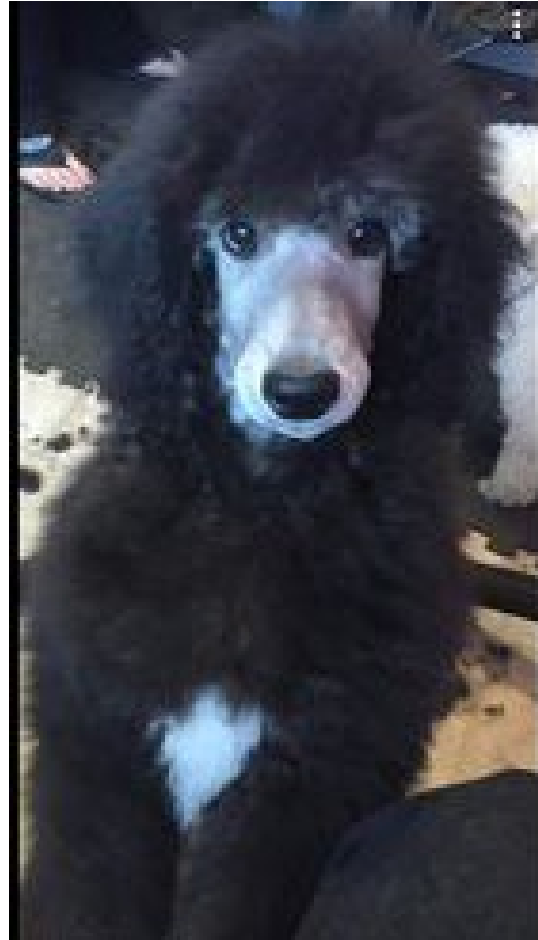
Parti-colored poodles are at least 50 percent white, with spots or patches of any other acceptable solid or patterned color. Full or partial saddles are acceptable. Ticking in the white of the coat is acceptable.

The examples on this slide are of parti-colored with patterns of phantom, sable and brindle.



Abstract

Abstract is defined as less than 50 percent white with the remaining percent any other acceptable solid or patterned color. Some abstracts, such as the tuxedo pattern, are very close to 50 percent and it may be difficult to tell if they're a parti-colored or abstract. The distinction isn't necessary, as both patterns show in the multi-colored classes. Some abstracts may only have barely noticeable white hairs on the chin, chest, or toes and may show in the solid rather than multi-colored class.



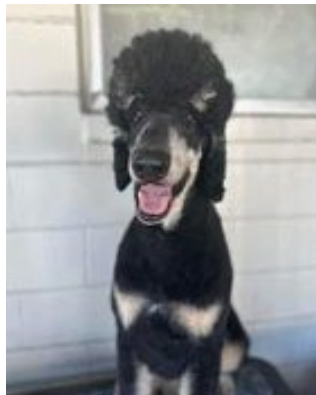
Sable

Sable is identified by black-tipped hairs on a background of any solid color, with no particular pattern or location designated for such hairs. They may be born black and lighten quickly as their black hair tips are shaved off during grooming. They may be a clear light body color (such as cream) with dark ears. Some, affected by the shaded sable gene, will remain dark on their backs, head and neck. Sables can be black or brown-based, and may be combined with abstract or parti-colored patterns.



Phantom

Phantom is a breed-specific color term known as tan point in other breeds. It includes those markings similar to a Doberman, with lighter face, leg, and chest markings. Phantoms are subject to progressive graying, so they can have very light base colors of silver beige or silver, making it harder to distinguish their lighter points. Some phantoms are “low expression” and have smaller points than others. Some phantoms are so low expression that they appear solid and would show in the solid class. Faint phantom markings are acceptable. A mutation known as “creeping tan” causes their points to spread. These are all acceptable. Phantoms can be black, brown, progressive graying colors, and may be combined with abstract, parti-colored and brindle patterns.



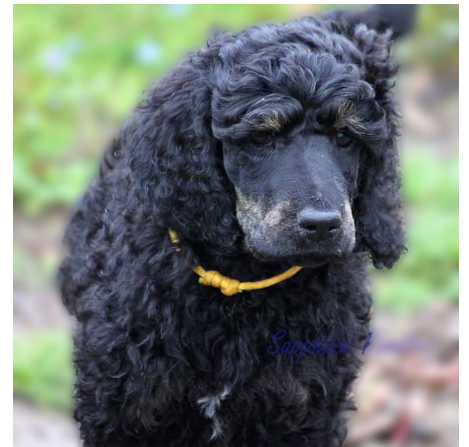
Brindle

Brindle is a solid color base with a striped pattern at the skin, with no particular pattern or location designated for the stripes. A longer coat may appear blended but shaved areas will have distinct stripes. Brindles affected by shaded sable may appear almost black. This may be referred to as black brindle or reverse brindle. Striping may become less noticeable with age due to progressive graying. Brindles can be black or brown, and may be combined with abstract, parti-colored, or phantom patterns.



Brindle Pointed Phantom

Brindle point phantoms have lighter points like a phantom, but there is brindle striping in the lighter points. The color distinction may be less pronounced due to the stripes blurring the edges. They may be affected by low expression as well, making their points less pronounced. Faint markings are acceptable in the multi-color classes. Some brindle point phantoms may even appear solid colored and will show in the solid class in UKC conformation shows. Brindle phantoms may be black or brown, and combined with abstract or parti-colored patterns.



Injury Discoloration

Any of the progressive graying colors- blue, silver, café au lait, silver beige, and even apricots and creams, will grow back hair in their original puppy color in areas that have suffered skin damage. This does not have to be a result of a major injury. It could be from a scratch that they licked enough to disturb the skin. Per the UKC multi-colored poodle standard, working gun dogs are not to be penalized under any conditions for scars or blemishes that may be due to hunting injuries, which this type of color scarring may very well be. It is also frequent on elbows and hips from the pressure of lying down, which is unavoidable and not to be considered a fault. Once the skin is disturbed and hair grows back in darker, it must clear again, taking as much time as it did originally, up to 2 years. This temporary “scarring” is natural and is not to be confused with merle.



Disqualifications

Merle and albino are not inherent in the breed, and have been introduced through mixed breeding. They are not eligible for registration in AKC or UKC. Any registered poodles of either color are the result of misrepresentation of parentage by the breeder, and are, in fact, mixed breed. Any non-merle born in a litter with merles is also mixed breed even though it's not visibly merle. After several generations these mixed breed dogs may test as 100 percent poodle, but are not considered pure-bred.

Merle is always a disqualification. Care must be taken to not confuse merle with brindle, clearing colors, or injury discolorations.

Albino, always a disqualification, will present as a white poodle with blue eyes and pink nose. Blue eyes with a regularly pigmented white poodle, or any other color poodle, indicates merle genes and is always a disqualification. The merle pattern will not present on a red, apricot, cream, or white dog. The blue eyes may be the only indication that the dog is hidden merle.



Summary

Poodles come in so many colors, shades, patterns, and combinations, that, combined with mutations and other variables, it can be quite daunting a task to learn to identify them all in the ring. The good news is all of the color options don't have to be memorized or distinguished. What colors can also be parti? What color do phantoms have to be? Is this dog blue or silver? They're all acceptable other than merle or albino.

It is important to recognize merle from acceptable brindle and injury coloring. Brindle is a striped pattern while merle is normally patches of dark on a lighter background. Injury coloring is also not difficult to differentiate from merle. Confusing these patterns to the point of disqualification or withholding of placements should be strongly avoided.

Some poodles have been excused from solid classes for their darker ears being mistaken for sable. If the ears are a varying shade of the same color as the dog, such as apricot ears on a cream, brown ears on a café, black ears on a silver, it indicates the natural progressive graying process and not the sable pattern. These dogs do belong in the solid classes. Black ears on an apricot or cream indicates sable (black and cream are not the same color group), which would compete in the multi-colored classes.

There is sometimes some confusion with lighter legs on a solid color dog being mistaken for phantom patterns. If the lighter shade is on the legs only it is likely the process of progressive graying. A phantom with noticeable lighter legs will most certainly have chest and possibly face points as well.

Blue eyes are always a disqualification. Any poodle in the red spectrum (red/apricot/cream/white) with blue eyes is hidden merle. A white dog with blue eyes could be albino as well. Both are disqualifying colors.

We hope that this presentation has answered some of the questions you might have about poodle colors.

For more information about the poodle breeds, please visit our website and/or Facebook page.

www.unitedpoodleassociation.com

www.facebook.com/unitedpoodleassociation



*By Wendy Coffey for the UPA,
May 2025 Version*

Many thanks to the people who shared photos for this presentation!

Jennifer Anders

AnnMarie Saunier

Emily Carabello

Anna Garver

Angela Morgan

Jamie Lee Whitehead

Yvonne Aitken

Julie Lund

Misty Frye

Rachel Peterson

Sam Peterson

Gloria Ogdahl

Kitty Check

Grace Malamala

Alexendra Beach

Kristi Storum

Wendy Coffey

Andrea Beach

Jenn Bills

Nicole LaVarier

Darla Gurth

Aleana Yokum

Jayna Marshall

Judy Neil

Sarah Faye

Jordan Burns

Tiffany Mohamed

Sheryl Edmondson

Marion Masek

Erika Slomka

Sharlene Craig

Kathy Esio-King

Deborah Bowman

Rachel Luna

MJ McJare

Karine Tetrault

Laken Engel

Dani Qualheim

Elaine Watson

Michele Harvey

Amanda Bishop

Kay Andrews

Joyce Pessel

Valerie Fisher

Eli Stilley

Jillian Prout

Sara Broton

Leah Rose

Cynthia Erickson

Alexis Helsley

Brandy Perry