

CARING FOR YOUR COCKERPOO'S COAT



Cockerpoos generally inherit a curly or very wavy coat and are not, despite some statements to the contrary, an 'easy care' breed. The combination of the woolly coat of a poodle and the silky coat of a Cocker Spaniel generally creates a coat that easily tangles and mats if not brushed regularly - and correctly - at home as well as being professionally clipped every 6-8 weeks, too.

Why is this? Dog coats have a combination of two types of hair in their coat, the soft, downy undercoat and longer guard hairs. Most dogs shed this undercoat, and this is what you see all over the carpets and furniture, but the Cockerpoo coat sheds very little or, when it does shed, the fur gets stuck in the coat. Whilst this can be great for those who suffer from allergies, it comes at a cost.



The undercoat gets longer and can tangle around itself, other undercoat hairs and the guard hairs, resulting in a matted coat. The hair that is shed can fail to slide out of a longer coat and instead gets tangled and wadded up in the coat. New hair that grows out gets even more tangled up as it can't grow out properly and this is how mats form so close to the skin.

PUPPY GROOMING - YES OR NO?

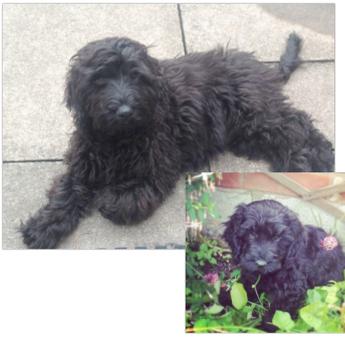


Most dogs change coats when they go from puppy to adult, and some will advise you not to get your Cockerpoo groomed until they gain their full adult coat, however this can lead to problems. Since most other dogs can shed their puppy coat, Cockerpoos are unable to do this easily and you will need to do it for him, brushing regularly and thoroughly.

That lovely easy to manage puppy coat suddenly becomes a nightmare, especially if you haven't had it cut to a shorter, more manageable length. To help you do this, your puppy should be taken to the groomer right from a young age to keep on top of the length and hence help you with brushing at home.

Trying to keep the coat long can be very difficult and easily lead to matting if you aren't brushing on a daily basis and the groomer will need to clip the coat very short to get them all out. Its easier to keep the coat shorter right from puppyhood to maintain it. You may read or be told never to clip the Cockerpoo coat until they are adults and that the coat will be damaged forever if you do. This is not true if the groomer trims the coat to a shorter length of say 1/2 an inch to an inch as you still retain the coat structure.

Also, your Cockerpoo will need grooming throughout his or her entire life, so you must ensure they are happy to be brushed, combed, bathed, clipped and dried - time spent getting your dog happy when a puppy will pay dividends for their future. Should you not take time to help your dog become happy with the grooming process, they can be fearful or even aggressive which is not nice for anyone concerned. They could even get banned from the groomers!!



Take your puppy to the groomer when they are young for puppy sessions so they do not fear the process - if you wait until the dog is 9 months old and matted, not only are they going to be scared and worried, but they will have painful mats that need to be removed and they may then associate the groomer with pain. They may well then become difficult or even bite when you try to brush them. Please see my separate leaflet on puppy socialisation and grooming for more information.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM WITH MATTS? CAN'T THEY JUST BE BRUSHED OUT?

Matts go beyond a simple tangle of the hair - imagine dreadlocks on a human and you'll get an idea of how solid they can be. They tangle the hair up right close to the skin, pulling and tugging at it which can not only be uncomfortable but cause lesions and sores. Left to form, this can be a welfare issue for the dog.

Besides discomfort and pain, there are also health risks. Extremely matted fur can harm your dog's skin, since it prevents moisture and oxygen from reaching it, turning it pink or red and creating open sores. That will also make your dog's skin the perfect environment for parasites to grow. There could even be health consequences for you - dogs can get faecal matter stuck to their fur, and if that gets tangled into a mat, it could be a health hazard for you, your family, and your dog.

Generally, mats will form in high friction areas or those areas that tend to get less attention. High risk areas are ears, where they swing back and forth, armpits, back legs and belly as well as places where collars or harnesses may rub. A dog will also tend to matt if they go into water a lot, run around in undergrowth or visit sandy places.



The trouble with mats is that they can end up wadding the whole coat up - termed felting, this is when the coat actually comes off like shearing a sheep, and can take a long time as seen here.

It really is not possible to just 'brush out' these mats, not only will this fail to effectively remove them, but it is also not fair on the dog. Imagine attempting to 'brush out' dreadlocks; it would be painful, take a long time and not bring a nice end result. Not only will attempting to de-matt a dog with a brush cause him pain, but it damages the coat, creating a velcro effect which will then tangle even more easily afterward.

Please do not ask for the dog to be kept long and fluffy if your dog is matted; it is against the Animal Welfare Act to put him through such a painful process. Instead, it is much better to clip the hair off and start again, after all hair will grow and your Cockerpoo is much less likely to hate going to the groomer if it is not painful for him.

Beneath this fluff, this dog is severely matted; however because the coat is very dense, it can be deceiving - you've brushed him and he looks lovely but the groomer then says he is matted. How can that be? Understandably you may then be upset if the dog has to be clipped short but the reality is that the matts lie right next to the skin and it can be easy to think you've brushed the coat when you have not got right down to the base.



This is a 'felt' from a matted Cockerpoo. It actually looks quite well brushed on the outside, but underneath it was solid matts and so had to be completely clipped off.

To stop this happening, you need to do two things:

1. Properly brush your dog regularly (see below) - not just once a week or every few weeks - right down to the undercoat. This is particularly important if you like a longer, fluffier look as failure to keep up with the brushing WILL result in him having to be shaved short next time he visits the groomer!
2. Get him professionally clipped and styled according to your lifestyle. If he swims, goes to the beach, runs in and out of heather etc then it will be much easier for you to keep him in a shorter cut.

BRUSHING YOUR COCKERPOO

When brushing your Cockapoo's coat it is essential to brush thoroughly and not just brush the top but right down to the skin as mentioned earlier. For a weekly thorough brush, use a line brushing technique. This is where you brush right down to the base of the coat, line by line, ensuring that the whole coat is brushed through. For curly dogs, it can be helpful to first either mist the coat with water, de-matting spray or a very weak water/conditioner mix.

Start off with a slicker or pin brush and go through the whole coat:



- Work systematically through the coat, separating it so that you can see right to the skin
- Use a 'pat and pull' method rather than scratching the pins against the skin
- Only go over an area a maximum of three times to avoid irritating the skin

Brushing right down to the base of the fur so that you can see the skin means that not only will you remove any tangles that may be forming, but you can also check how healthy the skin is and pick up any parasites - some owners aren't aware their dog has fleas because they've not looked right down to the skin.

When you reach a matt or tangle, use a comb to isolate it away from the rest of the fur. Be careful not to yank but go carefully - if you catch a knot in the comb and then pull it to try and clear it, it is very painful. Work out any knots by firmly holding the patch of coat that

you are combing in your hands i.e. the coat between skin and the knot. Then try and separate the knotty bits to break them down and remove. This helps prevent painful yanking of the knot as you are not putting too much pressure on the hair root. If the knot is really big or very matted then snip out with scissors going straight down through the matt away from the skin. Once you have done this, you can brush out what's left with the slicker brush.

Next use a comb that will pick up any knots missed by the brush. Start off with a wider toothed comb for a general comb through and then go down in size to work on areas that need more attention. With Cockapoos pay attention to the ears and legs and armpits as this is when you are most likely to find matts and knots.

Some people also use de-matters/matt breakers which are like a bladed comb which slice through the knot, but they need to be used with caution and care as they can easily cut the dog or your own fingers. Also, if they are used too much, they damage the coat, making it frizzy and more inclined to tangle again in future.

If matts are right on the skin and tight, do NOT try to remove them yourself. Instead, take your dog to the groomer, and they will safely clip them out.

You can also buy de-tanglers and de-matting sprays that are sprayed onto coat to assist in helping untangle knots and matts. Word of caution - Ensure that you safely spray, as if you get some products on your floors they can be like an ice- rink!

Ears and eyes need to be checked regularly and cleaned, claws will need to be clipped and the area between pads checked for foreign objects or damage to the pads .You can buy trimmers to cut the claws from most pet shops and online, but only if you feel comfortable and able to do yourself, If not a groomer or some vets will do this for you.



A well maintained coat can be groomed nicely and look great

* FOR NOTES ON BATHING, SEE MY SEPARATE ARTICLE