

Managing A 'Poo Coat

We decided to create this page as we see a large number of poodle cross breeds in the salon on a daily basis and 90% of our clients struggle to keep on top of the coat so we wanted to produce something to help you in between grooms. If you own a Poodle / Bichon Frise / Cockerpoo / Cavapoo / Cavachon / Jackapoo / Shihpoo / Spoodle / Labradoodle / Australian Labradoodle – anything with a curly, woolly coat, please have a read.

Back to Basics

Poodle's and Bichon's have what we describe in the industry as a 'wool type coat'. Their coats are soft to touch and are curly and it needs to be cut on a regular basis as it will continue to grow. Due to the nature of how the coat grows in a curly, circular direction it is prone to the hair strands getting tangled/matted up if not brushed daily. Cocker Spaniels, Cavalier King Charles Spaniels, Springer Spaniels and Shiatzu's all have a 'Silky type coat' Their coats also, like the wool coats, need regular cutting. Whilst they are both beautiful coats individually, when these coats are bred together, they can be a difficult to manage. One type of hair will grow in a circular direction and the other will grow in a straight direction meaning without correctly brushing, daily with the correct brushes and combs the combination of the coats will matt.

Types of 'Poo Coats

As with any cross breed, you can never really know for sure what type of coat your dog will have until it matures as your puppy grows. As a general rule of thumb, at the salon we see three different types of coats from the poodle/bichon crosses;

- **Wired haired** – these are normally found on labradoodles. Their coats will have the fine undercoat of a Labrador along with a more, longer wiry guard coat on top. A lot of owners describe this as a "messy" looking coat. These types of coats are a lot easier to manage at home with weekly brushing using a slicker brush. These coats don't matt as easily as the others listed below. Depending on client preference, as professional groomers we would recommend a 6-8 week grooming schedule to 'keep on top' of the coat growth.
- **Wavy coats** – These coats are not as easy as the wired coated cross breeds, but are easier than the curly coated below. Their coat is more of an even balance between woolly and silky and will have a natural wave to them rather than a tight curl. It will be soft to touch but denser so daily brushing is a must. The thick dense poodle coat will be growing in and around itself meaning matts will form quicker. These types of coats need to be professionally groomed every 5-6 weeks.
- **Curly coats** – As a groomer, these are one of my favourite types of coats to work on. They have great volume, they're lovely and generally thicker and they hold their shape well when cut and styled. However, these coats are the hardest of them all to manage at home due to the way the coat grows. Daily brushing *all over* is a must. Their coat is dense like the wavy coat mentioned above and less silky and will have

tighter curls meaning their fur is growing in a circular way and around the surrounding strands. Brushing every day will keep those hair strands separated and keep the coat matt free.

Brushing or Combing?

Simple answer is BOTH. As groomers after we've bathed a dog, we dry them with a high velocity dryer (blaster). This blaster removes all excess water from the dog's coat, leaving them 95% dry, but still damp. Then using the finishing dryer we will dry the whole coat and brush them through from the root of the hair (their skin) out to the tip of the hair strand. This is done over every inch of the dog, the legs, chest, tummy, tail, cheeks, ears, everywhere! This is for two reasons, 1- to make sure we get any knots in the coat out and 2 – to straighten the hair to get an even cut. This process is called 'fluff drying'. Once the dog is fully brushed through, we will then comb the dog with a fine-toothed comb from nose to tail and everything in between. Combing a coat will pick up any missed knots and highlight areas where you need to re-brush. Knots left in the coat will turn into matts if not removed. Our process is, if we cannot get a comb through the dog's coat then it needs more brushing. Think of a comb as a proof reading your work, your comb should be able to glide through a dogs coat.

What Brush and Comb?

We always advise two types of brushes for 'poos. You will need two a good quality flexi-slicker brushes, the softer more flexible one for daily brushing for short to medium length coats and a firmer, less flexible for coats in a longer style. A flexi-slicker brush bends as you brush the coat meaning by applying more pressure to get through the coat, you are less likely to harm the dog's skin. Incorrect over brushing in the same area can cause 'brush burn'. Where the metal brush bristles scratch away at the skin causing redness and a burn to the dog. Please speak to us and we can show you the brushes that will best suit your dogs coat type. For your comb, I always recommend a long-pinned metal comb with a 50/50 split. Half of the comb will have fine teeth and the other half will have medium teeth (the gaps in between the teeth themselves). The fine end will pick up any small knots that you will be able to brush out.

How to brush your dog?

I genuinely believe that the majority of our clients do brush their dogs, however a lot of the dogs will still have matts and knots in the coat and we see the shocked look on their owners faces when I tell them their dog is matted (this is why I wanted to write this). When you brush your 'poo breed, you need the slicker brush to go from root (the dog's skin) to tip. From talking to clients, I believe a lot of owners think they're brushing their dogs from the root but they are not, the dog would be matt free if this was done daily. A really good technique to brushing your dog is called 'Line Brushing' (have a search on You Tube for some videos). By separating the coat in sections at a time then brushing and combing through each section from the root, this will keep them matt free. We are always willing to show our clients how to correctly brush their dog if they want us to so if you are ever unsure whether you're brushing correctly please just speak to us.

"My dog doesn't let me brush him"

This is something that we hear on a weekly basis and we don't deny it at all. Dogs that don't let their Mum or Dad brush them are exactly the same with us in the salon. Brushing your dog shouldn't be stressful for you or the dog, it's a chance to build your relationship and bond. The same with groomer and dog. Dogs and puppies need to be trained on how to be brushed and combed through, it can feel funny on their skin to begin with. From the day you bring them home, start brushing them gently with a soft slicker brush and reward them. They will get used to it over time. Do not use a soft, bristle brush on them as this does not feel the same as a slicker and does absolutely nothing for a 'poo coat. Gentle brushes with a soft slicker brush will get puppies used to it. If your dog does not like being brushed, firstly I would be checking the coat for any matts. Brushes pulling on matts is painful for a dog and this could be why they are not enjoying it.

Common areas for matting

When you're brushing your dog make sure you brush them all over. Matts form for two reasons; 1 – lack of incorrect brushing and 2 – friction. Areas where friction is will matt a lot easier, this includes, armpits, elbows on chest, ears and cheeks, bums (from sitting on the floor) and where the harness and collars sit and rub on the coat when they're walked. The only way to avoid any matting is to brush their coat daily and pay particular attention to these areas. If they've worn a harness or a collar, make sure those areas are brushed through as soon as you've taken them off.

Below is an image of the areas of priority for brushing. The red highlighted areas are common areas where we as groomers find matts in the dog's coat.



"Can the Groomer brush them out?"

Well, the answer to this is Yes and No. If a dog has one small matt in one area that the owner wasn't aware of or could not remove it, then we will always try and dematt it. However, dematting a dog can be extremely painful for the dog so the moment a dog shows any signs of distress or discomfort, groomers will stop immediately. As mentioned previously, brushing and grooming a dog is meant to be a pleasurable experience for all of us, the dog, the owner and the groomer. Brushing matts out of a dog is extremely painful and not enjoyable for anyone. Not only is it painful but, if a miracle was to happen and matts fell apart, the hair shaft is then so weak and damaged that it will form into another matt within a short period of time and the vicious circle starts again. This is one reason why shaving off a matted coat is the better option; a fresh healthy hair shaft will grow back.

"Why was my dog shaved?"

Firstly, we will never shave any dog without prior conversations with the owner. If all parties agree then we will shave your dog. The length of the coat will be determined by how close the matts are to the skin. As groomers we need to be able to get our blade between the matt and the dog's skin to release the matt. At times we may be able to use a longer blade but it will more than likely still be a shock when you collect your dog.

As groomers, we never got into this industry to 'scalp a dog'. We love dogs and we take great pride in our work and genuinely love nothing more than seeing a gorgeous, bouncy 'Poo walk out of the salon in a lovely Teddy Bear cut, so shaving a matted dog off is never our first choice. However, we have to put the dog's welfare before what we the groomers and you the client want. Sadly, the reality is that a matted dog is in pain and the only way to relieve that dog of its pain is to shave the coat off and start again. The hair will grow back, our *whole* business model is based on that.

"I feel like a horrible dog Mum"

Please don't. These things happen. Let us help you so we can prevent it happening again.

We hear this a lot as groomers and this is the reason why we wanted to write this. We want to help 'Poo owners on how to look after their dogs coat as we really believe new owners are not aware when they bring that cute 8 week old bundle of fluff home how difficult the coats can be.

We always say to our 'Poo clients to have the cut that suits yours and your dog's lifestyle. If your dog doesn't like wet muddy walks and you have the time to brush and comb the coat an hour every day, it is very achievable. If you want that really long, fluffy, curly Teddy Bear cut here's our tips on how to maintain it:

1. Brush and comb your dog daily from root to tip with a good quality slicker brush and fine-toothed comb.
2. Your professional grooming schedule needs to be no more than four weeks. Book a few appointments in advance as most groomers have a 4-6 week wait for an appointment and leaving it till week 3 or 4 will mean another 4-6 week for an appointment and that is too long for a long 'Poo coat in this length.

3. Our general rule is, the longer the client want the coat, the more frequent you need to visit the groomers.
4. If you're going to bath your dog at home, make sure they're 100% dried and brushed through. Don't leave them to dry naturally. This will matt their coat.
5. Buy a 'coat management spray' to spray onto the coat after every bath. Using this along with a brush, comb and hair dryer will help keep on top of it in between grooms.

If your dog lives his best life in muddy woods and puddles my advice would be to have a shorter haircut. It doesn't have to be shaved to the skin, just a more manageable length. Keeping them in a long coat is *a lot* of work for you. It is possible, but I would suggest buying some good grooming equipment and a grooming table as that lifestyle and coat length combined is a real dedication.

If your dog really doesn't like you brushing them and everyone is getting stressed out:

1. Consider a shorter hair cut to minimise the brushing at home
2. Visit a professional groomer every few weeks for either a bath and brush or a regular shave down.

There are so many options that groomers can suggest when we know what your dog's lifestyle is like, what your homelife is like and when we know the type of coat they have, so please have an honest chat with your groomer about all of these factors and come up with a plan that suits everyone.

We hope this page helps you with managing your Poos coat and if you have *any* questions at all please just give us a call and we will happily help.

Mr. Pawfect
Dog Grooming