

Taming the Mane

What does it take to groom that magnificent Keeshond coat?

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Posted: Mon May 5 00:00:00 PDT 2003

The question is inevitable and ubiquitous among prospective owners researching the Keeshond: How much work is that coat going to be?

The answer is: Not as much as you thought, but definitely a commitment. People say, 'Oh, I don't want that hair all over the place,' says Robin Stark of Star-Kees Keeshonden in Gilroy, Calif. Stark has been breeding Keeshonden since 1967. But the good thing about the hair on a Keeshond is it rolls off clothing and furniture as opposed to sticking on it. Also, the coat and by extension the dog doesn't smell doggy.

Their shedding is [nothing like] the shedding of a German Shepherd Dog or Labrador Retriever, agrees Betty Ginsberg of Sahnsirai Keeshonden in Philadelphia, Penn., who's also an AKC judge. Those smooth-coated breeds shed smaller amounts regularly, while a Keeshond blows coat (sheds its entire undercoat) only twice a year. However, the Keeshond coat does need frequent grooming during the rest of the year.

A thorough brushing twice a week [from the skin out] will do the trick, says Ginsberg. Visits to a groomer are not required: The reputable breeder from whom you buy your puppy can guide you in the proper technique for brushing the coat. It's not like a poodle coat where you need an artistic hand to deal with it, she says.

While the Keeshond coat looks like it collects dirt and dust like a mop, the opposite is actually the case, says breeder Jeri Spalding of Allante Keeshonden in Evansville, Ind. A Keeshond can run around in the mud and get terribly dirty, and if you just let it dry, the dog will shake and it's almost all gone. Even with all that fur, it doesn't mat up like a dog with a silkier, oilier coat. As a result, frequent bathing isn't necessary: Every six to eight weeks is plenty.

In the spirit of making lemonade out of lemons, some Keeshond owners spin the soft undercoat into yarn. I have an afghan made totally out of Keeshond hair on the sofa, Spalding says. It's gorgeous you wouldn't know it's not some expensive mohair cross. Nobody can believe it's made out of dog hair.