

## Grooming Your Terrier's Coat

**Keep your terrier's coat hard with hand stripping.**

*Kathy Salzberg*

To compete as show dogs or simply to preserve their hard wiry coats, most terriers should be hand stripped. When they dashed into underbrush and tunneled underground in search of prey, terriers' coarse coats served as body armor. Today, most are pampered pets, but their hard and handsome "jackets" are still esteemed by true aficionados.

Clipping or stripping is a matter of choice. In the hands of a professional groomer, haircuts look great, but clipping changes coat texture and dilutes color. Chances are, a clipped terrier coat will never grow back as hard as it started out.

Hand stripping can be done with the fingers, but professionals use stripping knives to pull out, not cut, dead hair, always in the direction it grows. Stripping will not hurt your terrier. The topcoat hairs are loosely rooted. For show grooming, the entire coat may be hand stripped, from head to tail, but pet groomers usually use clippers on sensitive areas like the head and belly.

Not all groomers offer hand stripping. Since it requires lots of skill and time, expect to pay considerably more than you would for a clipped trim.

Don't try this at home until you learn how from a knowledgeable groomer or breeder. Beyond the stripping technique, you also need to know the "lines" of your breed to groom your terrier properly. For the Border or Parson Russell, styling is easy because their coats are stripped short all over their bodies. For others, like the West Highland White, Cairn, Lakeland, Wire Fox, Australian, or Norfolk, you need to blend the back, chest, and legs, so there won't be a sharp demarcation line between short and longer areas. Each terrier head has its own look as well, from the angled eyebrows and distinctive beard of the Scottie to the face-framing "ruff" of the Westie and Cairn.

Your hand-stripped terrier won't need to see the groomer as often as his clipped cousin, but if you let it grow too long, the groomer will have to deal with a "blown coat," stripping it all the way down to the undercoat, which results in a naked-looking dog. Most like to see hand-stripped customers every eight to 12 weeks, keeping them in a "rolled" coat with a new layer always growing in.

Learning how to hand strip your terrier can save you money and keep your pet looking sharp, as a terrier should!