

Groom Your Curly-Coated Retriever

A little brushing is all it takes for the Curly-Coated Retriever.

Phil Davis

Not everything pretty takes a lot of work when grooming.

Take the tight, springy curls that are the trademark of the Curly-Coated Retriever. It might seem a dog named for its coat would require lots of grooming. In fact, Curlies sport one of the lowest-maintenance coats in the purebred world.

With just a little brushing during periods of shedding and maybe a quick trim behind the ears and tail, the Curly-Coated Retriever is ready for the show ring.

"They are wash and wear dogs," says Kitty Jungkind, attorney; past president of the Curly-Coated Retriever Club of America, and owner of three Curlies.

Grooming wasn't the main concern when English breeders conceived the breed in the late 1800s. The goal was a tough, durable hunting dog that could shrug off the thorns and branches of English hedgerows and repel water.

That legendary coat is what distinguishes a Curly-Coat from its Retriever kin.

The AKC standard says the Curly's body should be covered in a tight mass of tiny curls about as big as the end of your finger. The coat is thick, springy and a bit coarse. The face, front, front of forelegs and feet are covered by short, smooth and straight hair. There are two colors: liver and black. Liver Curlies are rare, accounting for about 15 percent of an already unique breed.

Curlies share a hairstyle with Standard Poodles, which leads to misconceptions about shedding. "They do shed, but I find they don't shed as much as some breeds," says Jungkind.

When hairs turn up on the floor (or, somehow inevitably, in the butter dish at a dinner party), it's time to give the Curly a good brushing, says Stephanie Doerr, owner of Tails A Wag'n Grooming.

Even then, it's important not to overdo it. Brushing reduces the tight curls' abilities to protect the dog from cold, damp and sharp branches and brush.

"You want curly, not frizzy," Doerr says. "The only time I brush my dogs is when they are shedding."