

Grooming Your Maltese

Consistency is essential in keeping this little dog glowing.

Eve Adamson

Glamour doesn't come easy. The Maltese's Snow White beauty springs from a signature coat of long, flowing, silky hair — but a coat this gorgeous takes some serious grooming.

Although the Maltese coat doesn't require shaping (as does the Poodle's) or stripping (as does the Schnauzer's), it does require frequent brushing and combing to stay at its silky best and free of dirt, tangles, and mats. "The No. 1 challenge of the Maltese is the coat," advises Vicki Fierheller, a Maltese breeder. "Whether kept long or in a puppy cut, regular grooming is a must. If the buyer is not prepared to deal with the hair, then the Maltese is not the right breed to have."

Many pet owners choose to take their Maltese to a groomer monthly, either for more extensive grooming or to cut the coat short in an attractive puppy cut. Then again, if you agree with veteran Maltese breeder and American Kennel Club judge Ingela Gram, perhaps you will decide to keep your dog's coat long. There are plenty of shorthaired dog breeds. "Why buy something with the coat, the trademark of the breed, if you aren't going to keep it?" Gram asks.

Pet owners prepared to invest a little time can easily keep the Maltese coat in show-ready condition. Here's how to keep your Maltese gorgeous, with tips courtesy of Gram and Fierheller: Brush and comb your Maltese every day, or at least every other day.

Never brush the coat dry. Always spray the coat first, with coat oil or a little coat conditioner mixed with water.

Comb all the way down to the skin to be sure you've eliminated all mats and tangles.

Wipe the Maltese eyes dry every day to prevent excessive tearing and staining.

A tear - stain remover applied as directed can help keep the Maltese face stain-free.

Bathe weekly, using a shampoo designed for white-coated dogs and a good quality conditioner or crme rinse. Blow the coat dry, smoothing with a brush as you go.

Keep long hair around feet neatly trimmed with scissors.

Clip the tips off toenails weekly.

If it all becomes too much, the Maltese does look awfully cute in a short, shaggy puppy cut. (Maintenance: a monthly trip to the groomer.)