

Dog Grooming At Home

With a groomer suffering hand problems, a dog owner tries to groom her dog herself.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a five-year-old Tibetan Terrier who, until recently, went to a groomer who would cut her coat to a medium length or just trim her to neaten her up. Now our groomer is having difficulty with her hand and wrist and cannot use scissors to groom her any longer, so I'd like to begin doing this myself. What do you recommend by way of scissors and technique for grooming my Tibetan Terrier?

A. I sympathize with your plight – and that of your groomer! Scissoring a coat the way your groomer did is an art, not something you can pick up by reading a book or getting the right pair of shears. It takes years of practice to produce the smoothly-sculpted finish. It's like cutting your own hair – not a job most people want to tackle themselves.

Skilled groomers use their shears as an extension of their hand. When you watch them work, you will notice that the only part of the hand that moves the scissor blades is the thumb, not the forefinger that also holds them. Their strokes are even, never bouncy, as they work their way over the coat. Grooming school students practice several exercises to master the proper technique before they are allowed to scissor-finish a dog. They also learn how to use those razor-sharp scissors safely to avoid injuring the pet or themselves in the process.

If you do not have another groomer within driving distance and have no other alternative but to do it yourself, I would advise using snap-on comb attachments to your clipper blades, then scissoring to neaten up the final product. For the dog's back, a medium-length trim would involve using a # 2 snap-on comb, while a #1 would leave the legs a bit longer. These plastic attachments come in sizes that leave the hair from ½ to 2 inches in length. Several different companies manufacture them and they fit all makes of clippers.

Of course, your dog's coat must be clean, thoroughly brushed out, blown dry, and mat-free for these blade attachments to glide through the coat.

Always clip with the lay of the hair. To finish off, you use your shears to smooth out any choppy areas and trim the feet to a rounded look, the same width as the legs, without exposing the toes. Invest in high-quality shears if you plan to do your own grooming. I recommend stainless steel shears and would recommend you get both an 8 ½-inch straight and curved pair. Your groomer might be able to order them for you and perhaps offer instructions on how to use them.

The Tibetan Terrier is not really a terrier at all but was probably designated as such because of his size. In centuries past, these smart and plucky dogs were shaggy little sheep herders whose double coats protected them in the cold mountains of their Himalayan homeland. They are shown in full coat, their appearance as close to natural as possible – meaning no haircuts at all, but most pet owners prefer to have them trimmed to a more manageable length. I wish you luck as you take on the challenge of grooming this wonderful pet at home.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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