

Dog Channel - Summer Shave: A Good Idea?

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Summer Shave: A Good Idea?
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A reader asks about shaving down a dog's coat for the summer.

By Kathy

Q. I have a 10-month-old Labrador Retriever-Poodle mix named Jake, and I love his curly blonde coat. My groomer recommended I shave him down for the summer. It would probably make life easier because he loves to swim and his hair gets tangled from being in the water, but I think he would look ugly. What is the correct trim on a pet like Jake anyway?

A. Unlike purebred dogs in the registry of the American Kennel Club, there really is no "correct" styling for a mixed breed like Jake. The trim a groomer executes on a purebred dog should closely resemble the breed standard, written by breed experts and issued by the AKC to describe how the ideal dog of that breed should look. Of course, not many dogs come close to the breed standard of perfection, but a good groomer knows how to trim each breed to look the way it should. Obviously, AKC judges would frown upon them in the show ring, but we often do shorter "pet trims" that keep the breed profile look but make upkeep much easier for pet and owner.

For Jake, the right trim is whatever looks adorable to you, the owner. He does not need to be shaved to the skin unless his coat is so matted — groomer lingo for tangles and snarls — that it cannot be brushed out. A nice summer trim might involve using a clipper blade on the body — leaving one-half to three-fourths of an inch or so — and a comb attachment to leave more hair on the legs while still trimming it short enough for you to easily brush out a couple of times a week. Jake's head would look handsome with a neatly-trimmed beard and whiskers and a bit of a topknot to keep those curls you love. His tail can be either trimmed to resemble a short brush or clipped with the same blade used on his back. The ears can be clipped close to match the body or rounded with scissors, but keep in mind that any hair left on your curly boy must be brushed regularly to keep mats at bay.

It's not surprising that Jake likes to swim. He's descended from water dogs on both sides of his parentage. The webbed feet of Labs helped them swim to retrieve waterfowl, and despite their fancy-pants image, Poodles come from a long line of swimmers, too. Derived from the German pudel, short for pudelhund, the word itself actually means "water dog."

Although I think a short neat trim would work best for Jake, I am generally not in favor of shaving dogs naked as a way to keep them cool in the summer. As long as a dog's coat is well-brushed and not matted or packed with undercoat, it acts as insulation from heat and cold. And a dog with no coat to protect him can get sunburned just like we do.