

“Doodle” Do’s and Don’ts

Advice on mixed-breed hair maintenance.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a 17-week-old “Goldendoodle” (Golden Retriever-Poodle mix). He has beautiful hair, but we have recently noticed shedding and he has an area on his back above his tail that just doesn’t look right. He is losing hair there. It is darker, coarser, and curlier. Is this his new adult hair coming in? The vet thinks he is chewing there although I have never seen him do this. Would you know if this is common?

A. Because “Goldendoodles” are hybrids created by crossing Golden Retrievers with Standard Poodles, it is hard to pinpoint breed characteristics as we are usually able to do with recognized AKC breeds having generations of specific traits and qualities behind their pedigree.

This is not intended to criticize the “Goldendoodle” or any other “Doodle” dogs, now enormously popular. Just like all those age-old breeds created to be workers, hunters, herders, or cherished lap dogs, these dogs were bred for a specific purpose as well — to be loveable family pets. They are also advertised as nonshedding, a good choice for folks with allergy issues, and are adorable in appearance, looking as if they just stepped out of a Disney movie.

However, because they’re relatively new to the dog world, it is difficult to assign such uniform characteristics. Keep in mind that to even be considered for recognition by the AKC, there must be a breed club for the breed in question in at least 20 states, a national club, and at least 300 dogs bearing a third-generation pedigree.

If you have a first-generation “Goldendoodle,” one parent would be a Golden Retriever; the other a Poodle. That dog may inherit the tendency to shed from its retriever parent. A second-generation “Goldendoodle,” usually crossed with a Standard Poodle, would have a higher success rate for nonshedding and be better for owners with allergy issues.

While I think the coat change you described can probably be attributed to his adult coat growing in, it’s hard to predict exactly what that coat will look like. Be aware of the fact that a “Goldendoodle’s” coat can vary from tight ringlets to relaxed curls to shaggy.

Although often advertised as low-maintenance, when it comes to grooming, this is not the case. If you want to keep his coat full enough for a flattering haircut, you will need to brush your dog thoroughly about three times a week, making sure you work the coat all the way to the skin, not just doing a quick once-over on the top layer.

In the salon, we usually groom these pets with a snap-on comb attached to the clipper blade, sometimes the same length all over and sometimes leaving the legs a bit fuller than the body. When styling their heads, we trim the crown, leaving trimmed whiskers and a beard for that wonderful shaggy-dog look.

If the hair loss problem you are worried about persists, have your vet do a complete exam to rule out any underlying conditions like a thyroid problem or skin disease.

It is also important to feed your “Doodle” a premium holistic food, not one overloaded with indigestible grains, chemical preservatives, or those mysterious ingredients known as byproducts. Your dog’s unique coat will be his most appealing physical feature so you need to provide the nutrition he needs to maximize his health and beauty.

“Goldendoodles” are intelligent and loveable companions, good with children and other pets. Large to medium in size, they do need obedience training to develop good house manners. Because they are highly social, they require lots of quality time with their human families. Being such people dogs, they tend to get into mischief or develop behavioral problems if left alone for extended periods of time.