

How to Groom a Dog's Ears

Getting mat's out of a dog's ears takes time and practice to perform safely and correctly.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. What is the best way to get mats out of a dog's ears without damaging the hair?

A. Dematting – the process of removing mats in a dog's coat – is a skill that takes time and practice to perform safely and correctly. There are tools and products to make the job easier but it always requires patience and care to prevent pain and injury to the dog. In the cases of severe matting, I would recommend clipping the coat down and regrowing it rather than putting the dog through a process that may yield a sparse coat and irritated skin.

If the coat is brushable, you can sometimes use your fingers or the end of a steel comb to gently pick through the mats, loosening them so you can brush or comb them out. Do a little at a time – trying to pull them out will hurt the dog. You can also use a detangling spray or gel containing silicone to loosen snarls as you work. Silicone eliminates static electricity and allows your comb or brush to glide right through the tangles. A couple of words of caution – silicone sprays can make your floors extremely slippery and their frequent use can lead to a greasy coat.

Silicone dog grooming sprays can be used with dematting tools such as the Matbreaker, a small stainless steel implement with replaceable blades that slice through mats for easy removal. I recommend having a professional groomer demonstrate the safe use of all such tools and rakes because they are razor-sharp and can cause serious injury to pets and people. Employ them by pulling outward in the direction the hair grows, never twisting or using near skin flaps or genitals.

Silicone spray works best if allowed to dry on the coat but the gel version can be combed through when wet. Once the mats have been split, do not brush too hard with your slicker. The area behind a dog's ears is extremely sensitive and prone to scraping, cutting and irritation.

If you succeed, make sure you start a regular brushing regimen so those furry ears won't get matted again. And while you're at it, check for ear infections. A dog who constantly scratches at sore or itchy ears can create mats in the process.

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.

- Read more Ask the Groomer columns -