

Hair of the Dog

Grooming tools and techniques every Coton de Tulear owner should be aware of.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a 4-month-old Coton de Tulear whose hair is now about three inches long. I'd like to trim it myself to about two inches all over. What clipper blade will leave hair this length and do you have a preference for the brand of dog clipper?

A. There is no clipper blade that by itself will leave that much coat on your pet. The maximum length left by a blade alone would be about a half inch, left by the Andis size #3 3/4 blade. However, there are comb attachments that fit over your blades and will leave more hair. Made by Millers Forge and Andis, these spring-loaded plastic combs fit blades on all major A-5 clippers and work best when attached to size #40 or #30 blades, both of which cut far too closely to be used without a comb attachment by a novice groomer.

A large comb set made by Andis produces the following length sizes: #0: five-eighths inch, #1/4: eleven-sixteenths inch, #A: three-fourths inch, #B: thirteen-sixteenths inch, #C: seven-eighths inch, #D: fifteen-sixteenths inch, #E: one inch, #F: 1 1/4 inch.

Wahl makes a set of eight stainless-steel combs that I prefer to plastic because they are more durable, and have less of a tendency to snap off in mid clip and leave a bald spot behind. The #E size leaves one inch — the maximum length in this collection. All are available at www.petedge.com. I have always used the Oster A-5 clipper, but all major clipper manufacturers make high-quality products.

Comb attachments won't glide through your Coton's coat unless it is completely mat free or they will catch and tangle. To avoid injuring or traumatizing these dogs when they get badly matted, their coats need to be shaved down and regrown. As you know, the Coton coat requires frequent brushing and combing. I use a curved-bristle slicker brush and check for missed mats with a double-sided stainless steel comb, spraying the coat lightly with a heavily diluted coat conditioner to avoid coat breakage as I work. You need to be gentle as you brush one small section at a time, but make sure you get all the way to the skin. You may also want to get a Matbreaker: A tool that splits and separates mats for easy removal. It's best to have a professional groomer teach you how to use it safely to avoid injuring you or your pup.

Although the Coton does not shed, yours is at an age when it will be "blowing coat" — its puppy hair falling out as its adult coat grows in. The blown hair gets stuck in the coat and leads to major matting, so you need to get busy with the brush and comb before your dog becomes a cute little mat with four legs! When you bathe your Coton, all mats must be brushed out first or they will tighten up and need to be shaved out. Use a puppy tearless shampoo and a conditioning rinse to make hair manageable and eliminate static as you blow the coat dry.

Cotons that will be shown in the ring are not allowed to be trimmed, but many owners request puppy cuts when they bring their pet to the groomer. In its natural ungroomed state, a Coton's beautiful expressive eyes can't be seen, but are visible when their hair is tied up in a topknot or their faces are trimmed to give them a visor and full whiskers.