

Popular Styles of Poodle Grooming

Get the lowdown on the grooming routine and styles common for Poodles.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I found you on DogChannel.com and I thought it was an informative resource for dog owners. We are in process of acquiring a Standard Poodle puppy from our local breeder. I was wondering if you can share your experiences in grooming this breed.

A. The Standard Poodle is beautiful, intelligent, and loving -- a wonderful companion who you can be proud of. The only breed that comes in three size varieties, the Standard seems more dignified and regal than the smaller Toy or Miniature varieties. All three combined perennially put the Poodle near the top in popularity with American Kennel Club, where they currently rank 9th in registrations.

Poodles come in a wide variety of solid colors including white, black, apricot, and gray. In the grooming salon, we also see phantoms: bi-colored dogs with a symmetrical pattern such as that seen on a Doberman Pinscher (including but not limited to black and tan). There are also parti-colored Poodles: white-coated with a darker color as well, not conforming to a symmetrically distinct pattern. Although these are also pretty, such color combinations are not allowed in the show ring by the AKC.

The Standard Poodle stands over 15 inches tall at the highest point of the shoulders. Originally bred in Germany as a water retriever, its distinctive "Poodle clip" was designed for utility, not as a fashion statement.

In the water, a full coat could weigh the dog down. With the bottom half of the body clipped right down to the skin, the dog could swim more freely. The jacket of hair left over the ribcage was there to protect vital organs from the cold; the poufy pompoms on the hips and ankles to protect the joints.

Poodle coats are curly and crisp, lending themselves to a variety of scissored and clipped styles. The Poodle was truly the foundation breed of the dog-grooming industry, coming into its own during the 18th century when the young ladies of Paris styled them with hand-powered clippers beneath the bridges of the Seine. They were also highly prized in the royal court of Louis XIV. Naturally clean and odor-free, this is a nonshedding breed -- a big plus for owners with allergy issues.

With all these qualities to recommend them, Poodles are high-maintenance and rather costly in terms of grooming. The going price for a Standard Poodle pet trim is around \$100, which could be a "kennel," "lamb," or "puppy cut" with the face and feet cleanly shaven and that trademark pom left on the tail. Make sure to ask your groomer exactly what these terms mean as they vary from shop to shop.

Of these three pet trims, the kennel clip, also known as the retriever clip, would leave the least amount of hair with the dog's body and legs trimmed very short all over, leaving the trademark topknot and tail. Depending on how short the owner wants it, the groomer may use a #4f blade, (leaving 3/8 of an inch) or attach a snap-on comb to a #30 or #40 blade to leave a bit more coat.

The lamb cut is longer and fuller, a classic trim with the body shorter than the legs which are scissored like cylinders to look balanced with the body. The body may be done with a #4 blade or snap-on comb.

The puppy cut is a baby Poodle's first haircut, sometimes also called a teddy bear trim, and can vary in length from a subtle scissor shaping of the puppy's soft fluff to a shorter all-over trim with a snap-on comb and final touch-up with shears. On an adult Poodle, it may feature a subtly shaped mane from the base of the skull to the neckline to add a graceful touch.

The Miami trim is also popular and low-maintenance with its short-clipped body and pompoms on the ankles and tail.

In the show ring, Poodles under 1 year old are shown in the puppy clip, but it's a far fuller version than you see in most salons. Adults are shown in two trims: the English saddle, which features a full jacket; shaved band around the midsection and full hindquarters leaving puffs on the forelegs; banded areas on the rear legs; and a pompom tail.

There's also the continental, which has a full mane flowing into the bouffant chest back to the ribcage, shaved

hindquarters and legs with pompoms on the ankles, hips, and tail. Not many salons do these fancy trims and if they do, expect to pay a substantially higher fee.

We see our Standard Poodle customers on a four-to-eight-week basis, depending upon the haircut and home care in between visits. Standards also require lots of exercise and stimulation to keep them trim and happy. Because they are so social, smart, and athletic, they do well in obedience and agility.