

Grooming a Dog for Summer

Shaving a dog down is not always the best way to groom a dog for summer.

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Q. I have a grooming question about my two Pomeranians. I live in Texas where it gets very hot. We stay outside a lot during the summer, but it is getting a little hard on them. They seem to be miserable on hot days, even in the house. Can I trim their coats short for the summer? I have heard that if you do, it will come out much different and I probably won't like that. Their hair is very long and undercoats are so thick. Both of their coats are beautiful and I do not want to change the texture of the hair. Is this something that I should do to help them from getting so hot?

A. I do not think it's a good idea to shave a Pomeranian's body to the length of his head. This is a Spitz breed, originating in Germany, but its foxy face, pointed ears, curled tail and double coat makes it very similar to the Northern Breeds such as the Samoyed. Like its larger Northern Breed counterparts, its coat can actually be ruined by shaving it down to the skin. In some cases, only the fuzzy undercoat will grow back, robbing the breed of its beautiful and protective topcoat.

If you brush your Pomeranian thoroughly once or twice a week, starting at the same point each time and doing what we call "line brushing" – holding a section of the coat in one hand and using your slicker brush to work the area from where the skin is visible downward – you will remove the packed undercoat that makes your pet suffer from the heat. Use this technique to systematically work your way around the dog, brushing only a small section at a time. You need not put a lot of force into the brushing; a "pat and pull" technique works well and is less likely to scratch his sensitive skin. When your brush glides through the area you are working on, move on to the next section. Once you have finished, check your work with a double-sided stainless steel comb to make sure you have not left any packed pockets behind.

A dog does not need to be shaved down to be cool. If the coat is not packed with undercoat or matted, the hair "lofts" as the dog moves, cooling him to the skin.

If you find a long coat to be too much work, have your groomer do a "thin and trim," sculpting the feathers down with either scissors or a blade attachment to get rid of some length while still preserving the dog's profile and his topcoat.

Due to the danger of heatstroke, never leave your dogs in the car in hot weather, even with the windows partially open. Just like us, they need to curtail their physical activity when the temperature soars and when outdoors with you, they should always have access to shade and water.

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