

Summer Grooming for a Shiba Inu

No need for special summer grooming, regular brushing keeps the Shiba Inu cool during warmer weather.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a 9-month-old Shiba Inu. Does this breed need to get a certain haircut for the summer or should I just continue the baths?

A. The oldest and smallest of the Japanese breeds, the Shiba Inu is a small dog with a big attitude, resembling a pint-sized version of the Akita. Originating in Japan's rugged mountains, these handsome dogs were bred to hunt. They were tough enough to go after game much larger than themselves, but usually pursued game birds and smaller quarry. Along with their sheer gutsiness, they have a softer side, displaying a loving and loyal spirit towards their owners but they can be stand-offish with strangers and feisty towards other dogs.

This is a Northern breed of the Spitz variety, having triangular ears, a stiff, straight outer coat, and a soft downy undercoat – its thermal underwear in cold weather. In fact, the colder the climate, the bushier its coat will be. The outer coat's guard hairs stand off the body, about 1½ to 2 inches long, with the tail fuller and bushier, carried proudly up over the back.

In the show ring, trimming a Shiba's coat would be severely penalized. Pet Shibas should not be trimmed or shaved either. It would destroy their natural fox-like beauty and be unnecessary. Keep on brushing and bathing as you are doing, using a curved-bristle wire slicker brush all over your dog's body to remove loose undercoat and keep it from "packing" in pockets, especially on the chest, sides, and "pants," the thigh/rear end area. If you keep him well-brushed, air will circulate over his body and keep him cooler than clipping him down would. It is the built-up packing of that fuzzy undercoat that would make him feel hot.

When you bathe him, use a conditioner in the final rinse to keep his coat lustrous and manageable. Many Shibas adamantly resist having their nails trimmed, pitching a fit in a highly dramatic fashion, so get him used to paw handling and "tipping" those toenails from puppyhood. Because these dignified little dogs are so bright and independent, they need an owner who will lovingly set limits or they might get into mischief or try to rule the roost.