

## The Angle on Tangles

### Professional tips and products for dealing with matted dog hair.

*By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG*

**Q.** I have a Golden Retriever-German Shepherd-Labrador mix that is just about 2 years old. She gets knots of hair under her ears all the time. I've been cutting them out, but is there another way to get rid of them or prevent them?

**A.** Whether purebred or a wonderful Mixed Breed like yours, the areas behind and under the ears of longhaired dogs are often places for mats to sprout, sometimes becoming so tightly tangled that they are literally stuck to the skin. In this instance, the only way to get rid of them is to shave them out.

In the salon, we usually do this with a #10 blade. Sometimes the skin underneath can get irritated because we have had to shave it so closely, and we use an ointment like Skin Works by Coat Handler or Micro-Tek Gel by EQyss to treat the area and help it heal.

Skin Works comes in different sizes, including a ¼-ounce size, handy for the pet owner to continue applying at home. It is greaseless and fragrance-free, containing no steroids and also helps to heal hot spots, rashes, insect bites, and yeast infections. Micro-Tek Gel contains aloe vera and is also useful for a myriad of skin problems, including noses and paw pads that have become dry and cracked. It comes in a 2-ounce size and is also available as a spray.

Dematting, the process of removing mats from anywhere on a pet's coat, is a skill that takes time and practice to perform well and safely. There are tools and products to make the job easier, but it always requires patience and care to prevent injury to the dog. Cutting the mats out yourself is extremely risky because often you will cut the skin in the process. I strongly recommend taking your dog to a professional groomer to have this done, but if you must do it yourself, there are products that have been developed to make the job easier.

For tightly knotted mats, you can sometimes use your fingers or the end of a stainless steel comb to gently separate the tangled hair. You need to do a little at a time, yanking on the mat will hurt the pet just as it would if someone pulled a snarl in your own hair.

It helps to use a detangling spray or gel containing silicone to loosen the snarls. Such products include The Stuff, Show Sheen, Survivor Detangler and Shine by EQyss, Wild Animal by Laube, Best Shot, Abracadabra, and Stazko Spray. Silicone eliminates static electricity and allows your comb or brush to glide right through. Next, using your slicker brush, steel comb, or a dematting tool such as the Matbreaker, you can remove the matting from the coat.

Another word of caution: Because the Matbreaker and other dematting tools use razor-sharp blades, I recommend having a professional groomer demonstrate how to use them safely to prevent serious injury to your dog or yourself. Employ them by pulling outward in the direction of hair growth, never twisting or using near skin flaps or genitals.

The only way to prevent ear mats from forming is to brush the area regularly so they won't form again. They are caused by moisture from outdoor play or a canine playmate's saliva as well as the dog's own scratching and rubbing. It's a good idea to check for ear infection, which swollen tissue, discharge, or a foul odor may be indicative of. If you suspect this may be the cause, your pet will need veterinary attention.