

The Hairy Hairless

Caring for a Chinese Crested dog's coat and skin is best left to a professional.

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Q. I just got a hairy hairless Chinese Crested dog. He is three years old. I live in New York and this breed is not seen very often. Can you give me any hints for my groomer?

A. Officially, the Chinese Crested comes in only two varieties, Hairless and Powderpuff, so your little pet is the exception to this rule. While the Hairless variety has smooth skin all over its body, it does have fine-textured single-coated hair on its head, (called its crest), neck (mane), tail (plume) and paws (socks), from the pastern joint on the front legs and slightly above the hock joint on the rear legs down over the feet which are neatly rounded, looking like leg warmers (Remember those?). Areas that have hair usually taper off slightly, lending a graceful appearance to this whimsical canine that gives it a fairy tale character look. Its crest and mane are joined, as you would see on a little pony, the hair atop the head falling into a natural part in the middle. According to the American Kennel Club (AKC) standard, hair on the ears and face is also permitted but may be trimmed for neatness in both varieties.

The Powderpuff variety is covered with a double coat, a topping of guard hair over its silky undercoat. This light-textured straight coat is of moderate density and length. A heavy, kinky or curly coat is not desirable, according to the breed standard. Grooming for the Powderpuff consists of trimming its coat to a natural neatly-outlined appearance for the show ring but some owners opt for a shorter trim. Keeping it fluffy requires frequent brushing and combing to prevent matting.

Special little dogs like yours are born with a fine layer of hair covering their bodies. Lacking an undercoat, these dogs are still considered part of the Hairless variety; they are simply a genetic aberration, like pups born with no hair at all. To confuse matters even more, all varieties may show up in the same litter. To check whether your puppy is a Hairless or a Powderpuff, simply look inside its mouth. Dogs with the Hairless gene have "tusks", forward-pointing canine teeth which are usually the first teeth they will lose, while Powderpuff have a "normal" mouth.

Because your little fellow's coat should be shaved close to the skin, a job that takes a great deal of care and skill to avoid injuring him, you are wise to take him to a professional groomer. He will probably need a haircut every four weeks to keep him looking his best. Groomer Melissa K. Deeter of my staff has a Hairy Hairless named Kai that she shaves down close and smooth on all the areas where he should not have hair so when he's groomed, he virtually becomes an adorable example of a Hairless. She uses a #15 blade in reverse, carefully stretching his sensitive skin so it won't get nicked, shaving his ears and muzzle as well. She leaves the mane along his back and between his shoulders as well as his plume tail, and describes the finished look of his paws as "Clydesdale hoofs." He is bathed frequently with a mild soap-free shampoo.

"When these dogs are adolescents, they tend to get acne and blackheads," says Melissa.

She combats this with a witch hazel or tea tree oil spritz.

Our grooming manager, Anne Francis, also has a Chinese Crested in her personal dog pack, a Hairless named Caspar. To keep his blackheads at bay, Anne uses a scrub made of equal parts vegetable oil and sugar as an exfoliant. She bathes Caspar once a week in hypo-allergenic shampoo.

"These dogs are very high-maintenance," she says. "You have to worry about them getting sunburned or getting cold in the winter."

Chinese Cresteds come in many colors: solid, mixed or spotted all over. Still rare because they are not a dog for everyone, they are sweet, lively and playful, tending to become very attached to their owners. They do well with children who are taught to be gentle and because they do not shed, they are also a good choice for people with allergies. To keep the skin of the Hairless variety supple, massage a little oil or lotion into the skin after its bath.

The Chinese Crested is a member of the AKC's Toy Group, eleven to thirteen inches tall at the shoulder and finely-boned in body structure. Bred to be both companions and ratters, they made their way around the world with Chinese mariners and by the mid-nineteenth century, began showing up in European art. The breed was recognized by the AKC in



1991.