

The Right Brush for a Maltese

Technique and the correct tools can make the Maltese tangle-free.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. What is the correct brush to use on a Maltese? I have been using a pin brush and a slicker brush, and I find the pin brush doesn't get the tangles out as well. She is on the grooming table once or twice a day.

A. It's great that you're brushing your Maltese so often. What could be cuter than this snow-white toy dog with its coal-black button nose and sparkling eyes? An ancient breed, it was brought to the island of Malta by Phoenician sailors who traded around the Mediterranean thousands of years ago, popularizing their tiny companion in the process. Born to be pampered, these dogs were favored by aristocratic ladies as lap and sleeve dogs, perfectly fulfilling their role as love objects.

Because they do not have an undercoat beneath those snowy tresses, they don't shed, but their fine hair gets matted if not regularly brushed and combed. Its traditional grooming style calls for that flowing coat to be parted down the back with its head styled in two topknots. It is sheer poetry in motion to see a Maltese moving gracefully around the show ring, that fluffy coat bouncing as it glides along. To make upkeep easier, many pet owners choose to keep their Maltese trimmed in a shorter "puppy cut" style.

As you have discovered, the curved-bristle slicker brush is your tool of choice. In the salon, we work our way around the body, systematically brushing all the way to the skin and checking our work with a stainless-steel comb to make sure we've gotten rid of all tangles. We "pat and pull" one small section at a time, a gentle, rhythmic technique known as "line brushing." While holding up the coat with one hand, we brush down from the seam where the skin shows with the other. A gentle touch is vital; if you scrape that delicate Maltese skin, you can cause a painful irritation known as "slicker burn." To add body and manageability after the bath, we use a light conditioner, often spraying the coat with an anti-static mist as we blow dry.