

How To Groom An Old English Sheepdog ~

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Grooming an Old English Sheepdog properly, with the proper tools, can make all the difference in the world if you are to be successful in maintaining a full coat on an OES. That puppy coat will grow in excess of 12 inches usually in the first year or so, and learning how to groom that coat will ensure you have a gorgeous full coated OES who is mat free, comfortable, clean, and doesn't leave balls of fur all over your house. OES don't shed like other breeds, if properly groomed, on a good quality food, and healthy. The hair just keeps growing. Some of the coat that breaks off or comes loose, just as your own hair does, will get caught up in other hair and form mats if not removed by regular grooming.

When I was first learning to groom OES, I remember being asked "How much of your time does it take to maintain that coat?" and my reply was simply "All of it." It doesn't have to though. Having the right tools and sticking to a routine, of once a week thorough line brushing, ear and feet care takes about an hour to two hours and will keep your dog mat free and looking great. It only took me a decade to learn that. That is why I decided to write this, it doesn't have to take a decade for you to learn it.

Many people who do not want to do all the work required to maintain a full coat simply shave their sheepdog down once or twice a year, and brush the shorter coat every couple of weeks to maintain. If shaved right down, the coat grows back in at a rate of approximately ½" to 1" a month. I will go over that in another section.

To start with, when you get your puppy, the main things to have already are a good pin brush, a steel combination comb, nail clippers, a good blow dryer, and a grooming table. A puppy coat up to the age of about 4 months old needs almost no maintenance. It's only a couple of inches long, it is soft and fluffy, and can generally be brushed out in a few minutes. It's better to start getting your puppy used to these tools from a young age though, so that it becomes a relaxing, enjoyable event for them and there are no difficulties later.

I recommend putting your puppy on the table, laying down on his or her side, and going over him with a brush once a week. This is also a good time to clean the ears, pluck ear hair, trim the toenails, and trim the fur around the paw pads as mats can form between their toes too. I will go over instruction on all of these things as well.

It's best not to bath your dog too often, for puppies it may need to be done more often as they can get into more, but for an adult usually a couple times a year is sufficient. I'll also go over pet shampoos, whitening agents, conditioners etc. It is very important to fully groom your dog before bathing. The coat should be completely mat free, otherwise the water will only tighten mats and make them get bigger, closer to the skin, and almost impossible to remove. No conditioner or detangler is going to get them out in the tub, they need to be removed first. It is very important to thoroughly dry your dog after a bath as well, a damp coat will mat much more quickly.

To groom an older puppy or adult OES, first remember it needs to be done faithfully once a week. If I let it go even a few days past my usual Sunday grooming, I can tell the difference. The coat becomes harder to get through, takes longer to groom, more undercoat is removed because of snarls, and mats will have begun to form. If done once a week, it should only take about 60-90 minutes. This is an enjoyable, relaxing time for myself and the dog, like a mini spa day. If taught early on what it's all about, your dog will enjoy the attention, and the feel of the brush. Mine are especially fond of the belly being brushed, so I leave that for last to make sure it always ends on a pleasurable note for them.

Grooming Supplies

For grooming an older puppy and adult bobtail you will need the following tools:

Grooming table

Pin brush (make sure there are NO balls on the tips of the pins) (I prefer #1 All Systems)

Combination comb (I prefer Resco)

Small slicker brush

Hair dryer (any will do, better quality will last longer... my dream dryer is the K-9 III, but for now I think it's a Conair)

Small blunt tipped scissors for trimming paw pads

Normal sharp scissors for trimming feet, bum, and beard

Mars Coat King Mat Rake 8-10 blades (or similar product) (not necessary but useful)

Undercoat rake (not necessary but useful)

Nail clippers

Styptic powder

Ear cleaning solution and cotton balls

R-7 Ear powder

Hemostats (clamps, forceps) to pluck ear hair (this can be done with your fingers, but easier with forceps)



To begin, lift your dog onto the grooming table and lay him on his side with his spine close to the edge of the table. You should be facing the dog's back. Use your pin brush and brush a line of coat about 1 inch thick down parallel to the spine from the bum to the head. A few strokes through each section is usually enough, but if you do run into snarls or mats I will cover mat removal in another section.



Continue working in lines about an inch thick, using your pin brush to brush the hair towards you.



I line brush in this way until approximately the elbows, and just past the thighs



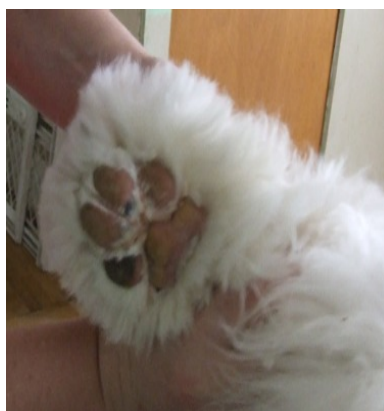
Then you will need your comb. Choose a foot, I usually do the back first. Now you will need to be on the other side of the table, with you facing your dog's belly. Begin at the toes and carefully comb down in layers, the same as you did with the rest of the coat. Smaller layers are often needed for feet and lower legs as those areas get wet, dirty, or matted faster. This ensures you get all the knotted areas before they turn into mats. Special care is needed in the armpit and loin areas as this is very sensitive soft skin, and also can be a problem area.



Next you will need to comb out the fur between the toes and paw pads. Mats can form in there and cause a lot of pain, and even lameness as the feet may splay out if not kept tidy. I do the full grooming once a week, but I only do the paw pad and nail trimming every other week.



Use scissors (I would recommend blunt tipped scissors even though that is not what I'm using in these photos) to carefully trim the fur between and around each paw pad so that it is flush with the pad. The pads need to be able to have full contact with the floor to give them traction and stability. Many people use clippers to simply shave out the large area between the toe pads and the main paw pad.



Then I turn the dog over and repeat everything on the other side.

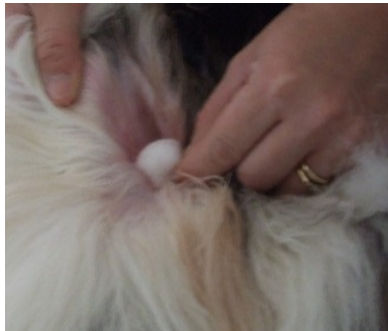
Finally, I use my comb to go through the muzzle and beard, as well as carefully comb the coat on the ears. The edges of the ears mat easily, and often go unnoticed. Use your comb following the ear from top to bottom and be VERY gentle if you have to do any mat removal on the ear flaps. The skin can tear easily there.

After combing the out side of the ears I flip the ear over and comb the inside ear flap. I then puff in a bit of R-7 ear powder to give a good grip, and pluck the hair from inside the ear with either my fingers or forceps.



The next step is to apply an ear cleaner, there are many brands on the market. If you have nothing handy, alcohol will work as long as the ear is not inflamed at all, as then it would sting. If the ear is inflamed or red at all, I would use witch hazel.

You can saturate a cotton ball and then clean as far inside the ear as you can go. I do not recommend using a q tip as the canine ear is shaped very differently than ours, and you may damage the ear drum. If the ears are really dirty, I would use a different solution (which is posted here) and fill the ear canal to flush it out, then resume cleaning as usual.





Either when you are finishing up or while you are working on the feet, is a good time to trim the toenails. Most Old English Sheepdogs have at least some white nails which makes it easier. You will need nail clippers, I prefer the guillotine style. You should also have some styptic powder, a styptic pencil, or cornstarch will work in a pinch. This is just in case you do cut into the quick. The quick is a blood vessel that runs into the nail. In a white nail it can be seen fairly easily.

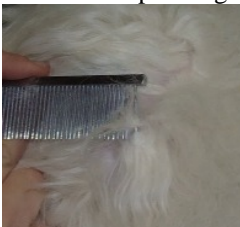


If your dog has one or more black nails, it is easiest to just try to trim them about the same amount as the white nails, or trim small slivers gradually until you can see a dot in the center of the nail, indicating you are close to the quick.

Once you have gone through this a few times, as long as you make sure you groom faithfully once a week, on an adult dog in full coat this entire sequence will take you 60-90 minutes. Maybe a little longer for every other week when you do nails, trimming etc.

Mat Removal

Having an OES means you WILL run into mats occasionally, no matter how well or how often you groom. Grooming on a regular basis and thoroughly reduces the incidences of matting, but they will still happen. If you stick to a schedule though, you will find them faster, when they are smaller and more manageable. To remove a mat first you need to isolate it from surrounding coat. If it is very small, you can use a comb, just the end tooth of it, to gently pick it apart and then comb it out. A slicker brush works well for tiny knots that slip through the teeth of the comb.



For larger mats, usually found behind the ears, and the neck and chest area, you can either use the same method (one tooth of your comb) if it is not too tight or close to the skin. With the tooth of the comb break the mat from the skin out into tiny mats. For example, if the mat is about an inch, I would split it into 6 to 8 pieces, and then comb out and maybe finish with the slicker if necessary.



If a mat is very tight, and or close to the skin, the Mars Coat King rake or similar product comes in handy. You simply pull the rake through, and the blades slice through the coat separating the mat into smaller mats you can then work out with your comb. Makes sure you use the rake only on mats as it does cut the coat and remove a lot. Even on a mat, if you have a show dog I do not recommend using this rake on very visible areas. It does however do a quick job without a lot of painful tugging and pulling on your dog's coat and skin.

Trimming The “Ends”

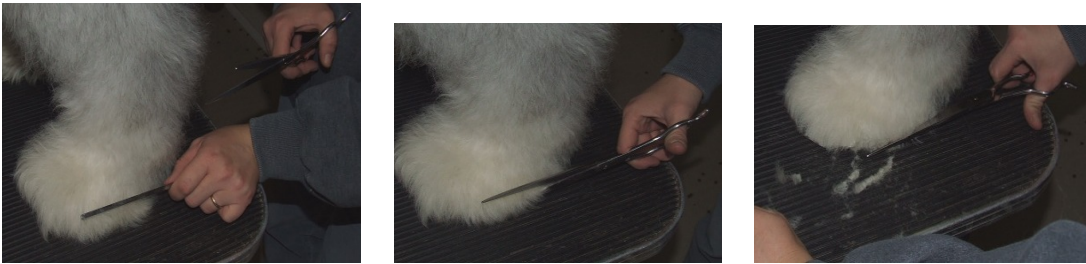
Trimming is something I'm still trying to improve on. Every time I trim I try to do a better job, but for showing an OES trimming is an art, and one that takes time and practice to master. For pets though, it is pretty basic, and if you mess up, relax, it's only hair, it will grow back ☺

For cleanliness you should trim your bobtails rear end every 3 months or so, feces can become tangled in the coat back there and that's a mess no one wants to deal with. (Just so you know though, it will happen, and if it does, pick off what you can, let the rest dry and then brush it out. Don't try to bathe it or you will have a matted dog... been there, done that) Feeding a good quality food will reduce the incidence of these “dingleberries”

For show, we brush the hair up parallel to the spine and trim in layers. It creates a nice finished look, but I'm not sure that is necessary for pets so I'll leave that to the real experts. For a pet, simply use a good quality, sharp pair of scissors, longer ones work better. Trim the hair in the bum area to 2 inches or less. For pets, you can follow the roundness of the bum, for show we trim on a slight angle. Trimming should be done from just above the bum to just below it.



Trimming the feet is a little more complicated for showdogs, we trim in layers to create that “pillar” look. For pets, simply keeping the longer hairs flush with the bottoms of the feet is sufficient. This will reduce dirt, rain and debris tracked in after your pup romps outside.



Trimming the beard is fairly simple, to reduce dirt, food and therefore odors that can accumulate, it's best to keep the beard to 2 inches or less.

It should be mentioned here that an OES beard does stain. The degree of staining varies from dog to dog and is mostly based on that individual's own pH level. Other things that may affect it are food colorings, water quality (clean and fresh at all times!) as well as what kind of bowl you use. A plastic bowl may harbor bacteria, leading to stain and odor, and possibly sickness. I prefer stainless steel bowls and wash them daily in hot soapy water.

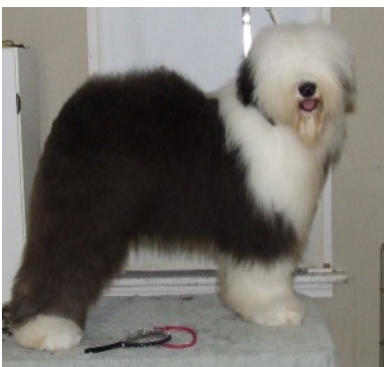
To remove stains, a bluing agent, sold at your local pharmacy in the shampoo aisle is very helpful. The blue in the shampoo tones down the color of the stain and brightens the white. Also, a self-rinse spray in shampoo found in pet supply outlets or at dog shows is good for a quick fix.



Voila! You have a beautiful sheepdog! 😊

(If not, please follow this link for “How To Shave Down An Old English Sheepdog” (coming in 2007))

Finally, the finished product!



I must give credit to my ever-patient models, Panda and Sky.



If not, please follow this link for “How To Shave Down An Old English Sheepdog” (coming in 2007)

As a sidenote, I am hoping this will be useful to those wanting to learn how to groom their sheepdog. As a pet owner I floundered for years trying to learn, and failed miserably for many of them. I have had some wonderful teachers, and have learned a lot through trial and error. I am by no means a professional groomer, nor am I the most experienced, but I think I’ve got the hang of it ☺

I put a lot of time and effort into putting this article together, the text and images are not to be stolen, reproduced without my permission, or posted on anyone else’s website without my permission. You are welcome to ask, and you are welcome to post a LINK to this article. I would appreciate it if you let me know if you do post a link to this, but it is not required.

Happy grooming! ☺

Sincerely; Stacey Hughes Hammond ~ Lakesong OES www.lakesongoes.com