

GROOMING THE WELSH SPRINGER SPANIEL

Contributed by Sandy Roth and Joe Cowdrick, Revised July 2023

This article will explain how to get a puppy accustomed to being groomed, how to groom a pet Welshie, how to handle that fluffy neutered coat and some tips on grooming the dog for conformation showing. There are many innovative ways to groom and present a dog for pet or show, just as there are different ways to handle dogs in the show ring to look their best. There are different opinions on how to groom a Welshie. The best presentation of the dog, according to the breed standard, should be foremost in our mind and not what the fad of the year is. The goal in grooming for all dogs is for health and cleanliness.

Welsh Springer Spaniels, by nature, are very clean animals. The coat texture is one that readily sheds dirt and is easily maintained. General maintenance grooming can be achieved with a greyhound comb, slicker brush, thinning shears, small scissors for feet and ears, stripping blade and toenail trimmers or grinder for nails. Grooming for the show ring requires a few more tools, some clipper work on the neck and ears and a very regular schedule. Many grooming tools serve the same purpose. It is desirable for you to try several different types of scissors, thinning shears and stripping blades or stones to find which ones feel comfortable in your hand to use. Welsh Springer groomers in the United States are more prone to using clippers for trim work, whereas in other countries most grooming is done by hand using scissors, thinning shears, stripping or carding blades or thumb & finger with chalk.

Getting started before grooming

1. Assemble all of your grooming tools which you will be using within easy reach of your grooming area.
2. A grooming table with an attachable grooming arm and a noose type lead with a pull release catch is best for control and safety while grooming.
3. Before combing the dog, spray a little water or diluted conditioner on the dog's coat and feathering.

4. Remove all mats and debris. For stubborn mats use a detangling spray like Suave for Kids. It makes the hair very slippery and the mat can be worked loose with your fingers and a comb. If you must cut a mat, cut with the length of the hair and not across.
5. Any stripping or carding to remove undercoat should be done before bathing.
6. To proceed with grooming, the dog must be clean to decrease the wear and tear on your scissors and clippers. Bathe the dog with a good cleansing shampoo. If your dog has skin allergies, there are shampoos that are soap free and hypoallergenic. Use a little conditioner, either cream or lanolin.

GROOMING THE PUPPY



Puppies may balk at being groomed, but if you do a little each day and reward the puppy for its efforts of staying on the grooming table for five minutes, you will be pleased with the results for years to come. Have a generous supply of puppy treats, which can be part of the puppy's regular meal, to make the new ordeal a big plus. The puppy should always be up in a comfortable position for you to groom. Grooming tables with an arm can be quite expensive. If you do not have a grooming table, you can use a non-skid bath mat and place it on a counter top, coffee table or picnic table. When the puppy is up on a higher place, you have more control and the puppy is less likely to run away. You should have control of the head either with a noose or collar for manageability.

WEEK 1 – Handle all parts of the puppy's body.

1. Handle the puppy's paws and wiggle the nails and press gently on the pads. Give a treat and praise after handling each paw.
2. Touch each ear and look inside. Give a treat.

3. Touch the muzzle and lift one lip to look at the teeth. Praise and treat.
4. Stroke the muzzle and the skull and look at the eyes. Praise and treat.
5. Touch the tail and tickle the underside checking the anal area for cleanliness. Praise and treat.
6. Run your hands down each side of the ribs and loin several times. Praise and treat.
7. Always keep the sessions positive and no longer than five minutes for the first week.

WEEK 2

1. Continue with week 1 procedures of handling.
2. Insert your fingers in the corner of the puppy's mouth and rub a few teeth. Praise and treat.
3. Let the puppy sniff several grooming tools, (comb, brush, toenail clippers, etc.) Praise and treat.

WEEK 3

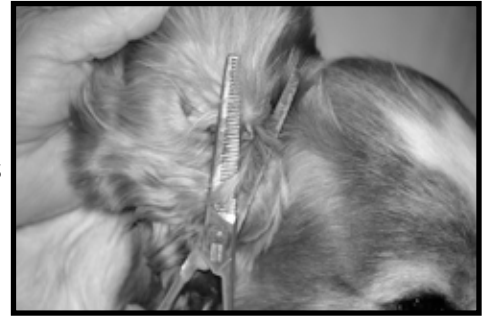
1. Continue with week 1 & 2 procedures.
2. Open the puppy's mouth and examine the teeth. Close the mouth and check the bite. Praise and treat.
3. Comb or brush the puppy's coat a few seconds.
4. Hold the puppy's foot and trim a few nails. Next day trim nails on a different foot. In four days you will have the toenails trimmed. Praise and treat.
5. Holding a grooming tool that makes noise at least 3 feet from the puppy, clippers, dryer, nail grinder, turn it on and off to get the puppy acquainted with the noise. Praise and treat.

The next few weeks are crucial in the development of the puppy and its trust and relationship to you. It is important for the socialization to continue between you and the puppy in a one-on-one basis for this special bonding time. Treats are dispensed very liberally in the beginning when you are training the puppy to accept and tolerate the process of being groomed. With positive reinforcement, puppies will associate the grooming process with rewards and once learned, grooming can be enjoyed with random treats.

THE PET TRIM

HEAD, NECK & EARS

Remove all the excess hair from the ear canal with thinning shears or #10 clipper blade. Good air circulation under the ear



flap helps decrease the incidence of bacterial or yeast infections of the ear. Ear cleaners can be used with cotton swabs to cleanse the dog's ears. Trim the top third of the ear, inside and outside with thinning shears or #10 clipper blade. This will help keep mats from forming behind the ears. The hair on the bottom two thirds of the ear can be plucked, stripped or scissored with thinning shears.

It is your personal preference as to how long you want the ear hair. Shorter means less mats. Photo above is a nicely trimmed ear.



For hand stripping the top of the head, you can use rubber finger tips (found in office supply stores) or sprinkle some chalky ear powder on the hair which enables you to get a good grip on it. Some people like stripping or carding blades while others like to use a stripping stone. Use what feels comfortable to you or a combination. The top of the skull may have some fuzzy hair which should be stripped. Usually thumb and finger is good for this area.

Thinning shears (shown right) can be used, but stripping will give a better appearance.



Thinning shears or clippers may be used under the dog's chin and down the neck to just above the sternum. There are several cowlicks along the sides of the neck and thinning shears can be used to blend the neck hair into the shoulders (right).



BODY COAT

The Welsh Springer Spaniel has a natural red and white, dirt shedding body coat which is relatively easy to care for. Remove dead hair and undercoat using a comb, slicker brush or stripping or carding blade. The removal of hair without cutting will leave a more natural appearance. Once the body hair is cut, it will become lighter in color and will not return the strong guard hairs. If the body coat of a neutered dog becomes so curly and unruly that it cannot be managed with stripping, the use of clippers may be recommended. A # 7 or #5 clipper blade gives a nice length to the hair coat and improves the appearance and cleanliness of the fluffy dog. The unruly neutered coat can be managed and kept clean with regular trimming. For older dogs this can be a quick way to groom the dog without having it spend an hour or more on the grooming table.

The shorter the feathering on the bib, belly and legs, the less likely there will be mats. Trimming of the feathering can be achieved by using scissors.

TAIL

The hair under the tail should be trimmed with thinning shears. Any hair on either side of the anus can be shortened for cleanliness. Clean the anal glands or ask your groomer or vet to do it. If your dog has a natural tail, the length can be trimmed with scissors.

FEET

If you have worked with your dog from puppy-hood, you may have trained the dog to lie on its side to have feet done. Otherwise, the dog will need to be standing on a grooming table and feel comfortable with having the feet being held. Care should be taken to check for any mats between the toes. Thinning scissors are used to trim the hair on top of the toes. Small scissors or clippers can be used to remove hair from the bottom of the foot between the pads. The top of the foot should have a rounded, compact appearance. Lift the hair from between the toes by brushing the hair backwards and using thinning shears to blend the hair on top of the foot.

Nails need to be trimmed regularly to keep the quick from getting too long. Use a nail trimmer or a nail grinder type tool. Keep styptic powder on hand during nail trimming in case you cut into the quick. Dogs who run every day on rough surfaces may not need nails trimmed as often as dogs who are on carpet and grass regularly. Nail trimming is essential for preserving correct mobility and orthopedic health of the dog. Nails that are too long cause the paw pads to spread out and put undue pressure on the toes with each step the dog takes and may be very painful.

SHOW GROOMING

Familiarize yourself with the breed standard. Know your dog's strengths and weaknesses. When you groom, accentuate the positive and show off your dog's good features. Remember that the coat should not be so excessive as to hinder the work as a flushing spaniel. Part of grooming should also include conditioning with weight being in proportion to height and preserving the rectangular shape of the dog. The Welsh Springer Spaniel should not be displayed with any excessiveness. It is the one flushing spaniel with no exaggeration or extreme in styled body type or customized grooming fads. Check the dog's teeth and remove any tartar that has accumulated.

GROOMING BETWEEN SHOWS

Between shows the dog's coat should have a conditioner applied to help prevent mats, split ends and to keep the feathering oiled. Two to three weeks before the show, the dog should be combed out, remember to dampen the coat before combing. Gently remove all mats using detangling spray and a mat splitter or end of the comb. Using a stripping blade or a fine toothed-comb, work on the body coat starting at the neck and working toward the rear of the dog. This will get some of the soft undercoat and dead hair removed to make the top coat lie smoother to the body. Work in the direction the way the hair grows. Work all the way down each front

leg and the side of the rear legs removing the fuzzy hair at the top of the



front leg and the side of the hock. Some of this fuzzy hair on the rear leg is easily removed with thumb and finger stripping and a little chalky ear powder. Work on the dead hair of the body coat before bathing because you can get a better grip on dirty hair. More dead hair will come out after bathing, as well, as massaging of the body hair during the bath.

Bathe the dog with a good cleaning shampoo. If there are stubborn stains or grease, you can use some diluted detergent like Dawn for ease in getting out the stains. Products that are made especially for dogs should be used as much as possible. Apply a light conditioner to keep the dog's coat moisturized and texturized. The body coat should be brushed in the direction it grows and can be toweled to make the hair lie flat. Feathering can be dried using a hair dryer on a cool setting.

SHOW TRIM – HEAD, EARS, & NECK

Now that the dog is mat free, has some dead hair removed is bathed and dried, you are ready to start the initial trim for the show. Set

your dog up in front of a mirror and see what the judge is going to see. Look at the outline you want to present to the judge and determine how best to groom your dog for that polished presentation. Begin the initial show trim of the dog at least two weeks before the show because the hair grows back just slightly enough to give a more natural appearance.

Start with the head, ears and neck. It is your preference to use clippers or thinning shears to remove the hair from the top third of the



inside and outside of the ear. For clipping, use a #10 blade against the grain of the hair on the top third of the ear and use thinning shears to blend the bottom two thirds of the ear. All the hair is removed from the ear canal opening to allow for air flow and decrease the chances of ear infection. Referring to ears, the breed standard says "Gradually narrowing towards the tip, they are shaped somewhat like a vine leaf and are lightly feathered." Thinning scissors, stripping blade or stone is used to blend the top of the ear with the skull. Any fuzzy hair on top of the skull should be stripped out. Overall balance is most important with a slightly domed skull and a clearly defined stop. Blend the back of the skull into the neck with thinning scissors. White hair tends to grow more profusely than red hair on Welshies. If your dog has a big white collar, you will have more stripping and thinning to do.

Trim the front of the neck starting under the chin with a #10 clipper blade and working down to an inch above the sternum from seam to seam. Using thinning shears, blend the hair of the seam (cowlick where the neck hair changes growing direction) on the neck. Try several different tools to blend the neck hair into the shoulder. Find what is comfortable for you to use. Viewing the neck from the front,

there should be a slight tendency for an “A” shaped bib. The “A” is formed from the top of the sternum and drawing an imaginary line out to the left and right points of the shoulder and down the front legs. The top of the “A” will be wider or narrower, depending on what appearance you want to achieve with the dog’s front. If your dog has good, straight front legs, any wisps of hair on top of the legs can be thinned or stripped to enhance the front movement coming toward the judge. As viewed from the front and side, the chest feathering should not go below the dog’s knee (carpal joint). Before trimming the bib, set up your dog in front of the mirror to see what shape you want to achieve.

SHOW TRIM – BODY

The body coat should be brushed to bring out the natural oils and shine. Never brush or comb a dry coat. Always spray lightly with water or a diluted conditioner. Massage the coat with your fingers to loosen any dead hair, then, brush again. Work from the neck, down the shoulders, across the back and all the way down the front and rear legs. The top coat of the dog will be straighter and lie flatter if dead hair and fluffy undercoat is removed weekly. This can be done with fingertip massages or stripping tools. Toweling the dog after bathing will help the coat lie flat. The breed standard states: “The back of the forelegs, the hind legs above the hocks, chest and underside of the body are moderately feathered. Coat so excessive as to be a hindrance in the field is to be discouraged. Obvious barbering is to be avoided as well.” Holding the front paw forward, trim the foreleg feathering with scissors.



SHOW TRIM – REAR & TAIL

Feathering on the rear legs should not go much below the hocks. The body feathering can be tapered slightly from behind the front legs to blend with the hair on the inside of the rear legs. Any fuzzy hair on the outside of the rear leg near the stifle and hock should be stripped away.

Excess hair under the tail should be removed with thinning shears. Any stray hairs on either side of the anus should be blended. If your dog has a natural tail, the hair can be shaped with scissors. For a neat end of the tail, take the excess hair beyond the tailbone, twist it several times and cut it between the end of the tailbone and your fingers, being careful to only cut hair. The rest of the hair can be shaped in a nice short arc to represent a spaniel and not long like a setter.



Trimming the Docked Tail - Before and After



Trimming the Natural Tail - Before and After

SHOW TRIM – FEET

Trim the feet to give a round, tight appearance. The tops of the feet can be shaped with thinning scissors, making sure to remove any mats between the toes. The bottoms of the feet should be cleared of all excess hair between the pads and shaped around the toes. This can be achieved with scissors or clippers.



Nails should be trimmed as often as necessary to keep the quick from getting too long. Use nail trimmers or a nail grinder type tool. Trim toenails on a regular basis but not the week of the show, in case you get one too short, it will give the nail a chance to heal. You do not want a limping dog in the ring.



A Trimmed Foot

FINAL TOUCHES

A week before the show, bathe the dog using a regular shampoo or any special whitening or coat enhancing shampoo. If your dog has not gotten really dirty, you can just bathe the feathering on the bib, belly and legs. Blow dry the feathering with a cool setting on the dryer. Towel the body for a smooth, flat coat. After the dog has dried, stand in front of the mirror and see if any final trimming needs to be done. Continue to brush the body coat every day to bring out the natural shine. The day before the show, wash the feathering again. Before you travel, look in the mirror one last time before heading to the show site.

The day of the show you may want to dampen or wash the feathering, especially if you have a male who urinates on his feathering. Blowing it dry gives a nice finished appearance. Check the eyes, ears and teeth and do any necessary cleaning. Keeping the whiskers is a personal preference. Whether grooming for pet or show, the relationship you develop with your dog needs to be a trusting one. Trim those toenails regularly, keep the dog clean and offer treats often for good behavior. Remember the goal in grooming is for good health, welfare and cleanliness of the dog.

