



Grooming and Deshedding a Tibetan Mastiff

One of the greatest allures of the Tibetan Mastiff (TM) is its magnificent coat. In their native land, their coat is essential for survival, but many people are initially drawn to the breed for the aesthetics of the coat. They quickly realize that they have taken on more dog, and more coat, than they know how to handle. For the better part of the year, the TM coat requires very little maintenance, but when Spring comes and they start to lose their undercoat, a process referred to as “blowing coat”, it’s a whole new ballgame. Proper grooming, with the right set of tools, can both decrease your workload and lessen the stress for your TM.

Getting started

Start with a thorough pre-bath blow out to get rid of any dust, dirt, loose hair, or debris in the coat. Power blow is the key: An 8 amp, double motor, high velocity dryer works well. It will blow the dirt right off the coat, but lower the speed when using near the ears and eyes. Blow the coat until you no longer see particles coming out. This may take 15-20 minutes for the dogs with longer coat. When blowing coat, the next step is to use your undercoat rake to rake out as much loose fur as possible. Wetting loose fur will cause the fur to clump together and create an impenetrable mat, so it is essential that you eliminate as much loose coat as you can now, before putting the dog in the bath. Follow this with a mat-zapper slicker brush. It will break up clumps gently. Check the soft hair behind the ears and in the britches that are most prone to hidden tangles and mats, and you may also find that you have large clumps that didn’t break up with the dryer or rake. These call for a detangler spray (either oil or silicone based) or conditioner as a lubricant. It is not advisable to use an oil-based detangler on the entire coat, ever, and especially not between baths. It leaves a greasy feel, weighs down the coat, and will trap dirt, making more frequent grooming necessary, but it can work wonders on mats. Work your detangler into the clumps, soaking thoroughly; rub in, and let sit. Try blowing the clumps using the concentrator nozzle on your dryer: It works 90% of the time. You don’t want to jerk and pull on tangled, impacted, or matted hair. This causes tearing of the living hair and can result in a rough and overworked coat when you’re done, not to mention it feels like torture to the dog. Comb through any remaining tangles and mats with a wide toothed metal comb. If mats are small, use a finer toothed comb. If all else fails, and you feel compelled to pull out the scissors, cut straight lines into the mat, separate the clump, and pull apart. Do not cut across the mat to cut it out of the fur. This will create a new starting point for matting as the hair starts to regrow, and you will find yourself in a vicious cycle. Use blunt tip scissors, like nursing bandage scissors, and cut straight in, a little at a time, stopping to work the hair loose from the mat as you go.

Bath time

Use the “warm water with shampoo and cool water with conditioning method”. Shampoo and warm water work to clean the hair, but also opens up the follicles. When the hair shaft expands and opens up, the coat gets cleaner, but if not followed by cool water and a conditioner, the hair shaft stays open and can make the brush out difficult. The TM coat naturally sheds water, so it will take some time to work your way through the coat to the skin. Wet, add shampoo, and massage in; repeat until you get lather all the way to the skin. Wash with a good quality “volume” shampoo. If you want to go the extra mile, wash again with shampoo mixed with raw sugar to exfoliate and gently break up debris pockets. Rinse thoroughly until your water runs clear, which with a TM, will take as much or more time than washing. Follow with conditioner and rinse again with cool water. If

time is an issue, try using a shampoo/conditioner combo product: One step to clean and condition. Even with this time saving step, expect to spend at least an hour on the bath. These coats need to be gently and thoroughly tended.

High and Dry

Time to dry. This is going to take at least 2 hours. Using your high velocity dryer, start at the spine. Think gravity: Water flows down. Learn and use a line drying technique. Divide the coat and blow dry one layer at a time, working your way down and out. Once the coat feels about 90% dry, mist with a light, leave-in conditioner or hydrating spray. This will help with shine and making the physical brush out easier. This is a good time to trim nails and clean the ears while the coat has time to cool down and relax. Once the nails and ears are done, feel for areas that may still be damp and complete the drying process. Allowing the coat to rest and cool allows water from the skin to wick back up into the coat, and you will find moisture pockets that were not previously there. Dry completely, all the way to the skin. If you leave the coat damp, that lovely thick coat traps the moisture in and it can lead to skin break down and hot spots.

Brush

At this point, air and water should have done most of your work. The real thing to stress is not to tug, pull, cut, or yank. This action will break the guard hair and hurt the dog. They don't need to associate grooming with pain as it's something that will always be a part of their lives. Use a long pin brush (27-35 mm pin length) for the bulk of the body brushing and use a wide toothed comb (poodle comb) on the mane and tail. Finish and smooth with a slicker brush. All the while this is going on, watch your dog. If he is wincing, slow down. It shouldn't hurt and if it does, you're harming healthy hair and skin and your results will reflect it. Once you brush the dog out and feel no clumps or mats, run your wide toothed comb through the entire coat. However, do not yank. If you hit obstructions, get your slicker out and slowly work on the spot.

Your Tibetan Mastiff is now de-shedded, groomed and ready for some finishing touches. As you comb out, trim in lightly using straight scissors just to smooth out any wayward hairs that have a mind of their own. Brush the feet up and trim the long hair on the feet with curved scissors to give a tight, cat-foot like appearance. Love and enjoy!

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