

# Don't Shave Your Double-Coated Dog

By Julia Henriques

Double-coated breeds have two layers to protect against arctic weather. The long guard hairs form the outer layer and protect against snow or ice and even shed water. The soft undercoat lies close to the skin and keeps your dog warm and dry. In winter this undercoat can be so thick you may have trouble finding your dog's skin.

In summer, your dog should shed his soft undercoat, leaving just the guard hairs. The job of the guard hairs in warm weather is to protect your dog from sunburn and insulate him against the heat. Without the undercoat, air can circulate through the guard hairs, cooling the skin.

Unlike single coated breeds, who have hair that just keeps growing, double coats grow to a certain length and don't get any longer. So you can shave a single-coated breed down and the coat will grow back again without really changing it. But that's not true for double coats.

Shaving a double-coated breed can really ruin the coat.

## *Shaving Changes the Coat Texture*

If you shave your double-coated dog, you'll probably notice new hair starting to grow in pretty quickly. Unfortunately what happens is that the undercoat grows first ... that soft fuzzy stuff that stays next to the skin and keeps your dog warm. The guard hairs are slower growing and you'll soon start to see them mixed in with the fluffy undercoat.

At this stage you'll probably also notice that the texture of the new double coat coming in doesn't feel the same as it did before. It tends to be "sticky" and Velcro-like. Your dog will come in from the yard with burrs, seeds, grass, twigs and whatever other plant life he passes, stuck to his coat.

This combination of soft undercoat growing with the guard hairs will also make your dog hot in summer, because the undercoat stops the air from getting to his skin and prevents the natural cooling process. The texture of the undercoat also absorbs the sun's rays and contributes to overheating.

And in winter, the new sticky texture of his regrown coat means the undercoat will be more likely to mat, which can cause skin irritations like hot spots.

## *Shaving Doesn't Keep Your Dog Cool*

What's supposed to happen is that your dog sheds his undercoat in summer, leaving the guard hairs to provide your dog with insulation, and allowing cool air to circulate near his skin.

The guard hairs also prevent your dog from getting sunburned. Many double-coated dogs have pale pink skins (especially the northern breeds), and just like a pale skinned human, they're more susceptible to sunburn. The guard hairs reflect the sun's rays, protecting the skin from the sun.



So, if your dog has a thick double coat, and he still has his undercoat in summer, you might think that getting rid of the whole lot of it will help keep him cool.

But it won't. First of all, whatever fuzzy coat is left after shaving will prevent cool air from getting to the skin. But the shaved coat also lets the sun through to the skin. This exposes him to the danger of overheating, sunburn and potentially even skin cancer.

#### *A Better Way*

The best way to help your double-coated dog stay cool in summer is to take him to the groomer. Ask her to bathe him and then blow out the undercoat with the high powered dryers. Most will also use a tool like a rake to help remove the coat.

Of course you can also use your own grooming tools to brush or comb your dog and remove the undercoat. But it can be a big job and your groomer will have the right equipment to do the job efficiently.

Just be careful about your choice of groomer and make sure she knows you don't want her to shave your dog. Talk to the groomer who'll be working on your dog and make sure she has experience with double coated dogs – and doesn't believe in shaving!

Be very clear, because some groomers will take the easy route if you don't give them specific instructions. Owners of double-coated dogs have been known to leave their dog at the groomer for a bath, blow dry and comb-out. But when they came to pick up their dog, they found the groomer had shaved him down.

#### *Four Ways To Help Your Dog Stay Cool*

So, once your dog has had his undercoat removed, the guard hairs can do their job naturally. But there are other things you can do in summer to prevent your dog from overheating.

##### **#1 Carry Water**

It's really smart to carry water for your dog on summer walks. You can buy doggie water bottles with a special lid that doubles as a drinking cup. There are also portable water bowls you can fill from a regular water bottle or drinking fountain. If you see your dog panting heavily and his tongue getting wider, make sure you offer him water.

##### **#2 Monitor His Activity**

Some dogs who love playing games like fetch will do it all day without realizing they're getting too hot. Watch for signs your dog should stop for a drink and a rest!

##### **#3 Let Him Get Wet**

Buy a kiddie pool for your backyard so your dog can cool off. Or take him to natural environments where he can play in a river, creek, pond or lake or dig in a muddy river bank to cool off. I think this is a life-saver for my dogs in summer. Yes, they get wet and filthy, but they can enjoy hours of hot weather activity without overheating.

##### **#4 Indoor cooling**

Air conditioning and fans will of course help your dog stay cool indoors. A lot of dogs will choose to lie on a cool tile floor instead of a bed or rug in warm weather – or even right on the A/C vent!

You can also buy cooling pads for your dog and they're quite effective. The gel ones are nice and light compared to the water-filled ones, but just be careful if you have a chewer as you don't want them swallowing the gel.

