

# The ~~Dreaded~~ Coat Change



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Are Cotons single or double coated? Some people contend that the Cotons are single coated. However, despite that the undercoat is hard to detect, most people consider the Coton a double-coated breed. Between the ages of approximately 8-12 months, Cotons undergo a change from their puppy coat to their adult coat. This means that they lose (or blow) their undercoat. This change creates matting. And this is the stage when people get panicky! The Coton coat is not for the faint hearted – it takes dedication and perseverance to get through this stage.

## TO CUT OR NOT TO CUT

Some people choose to have their dog's coat cut back to a shorter length, making it easier to care for. I do not recommend shaving. It is my opinion that this turns a beautiful dog into an ugly one. The Coton derives its name from its coat and certainly their coat is a very big part of their beauty. Everyone will agree, there is nothing more beautiful than a full coated, well-groomed Coton. If you choose not to keep the Coton in the longer coat, a good groomer can cut the coat to a very manageable length that is also very pretty. Don't take your matted dog to the groomer thinking that she is going to get out all of your mats for you. Generally speaking, groomers will shave a badly matted dog.

There is an alternative to trimming back the coat. When grooming, incorporate conditioner into the dry coat (completely lathered) and comb out the undercoat. This leaves the long hair without the undercoat. When you do this, start with a big-toothed comb and work down to the finest toothed comb you have, then shampoo and condition as usual.

## DAILY DEDICATION

If you are in love with the Coton coat, as I am, then be prepared during this coat change to dedicate time every day for grooming your dog. I recommend bathing the dog whenever a lot of mats start to form. This will help to reduce the matting. Combing and brushing will help keep mats out but does nothing to stop the re-matting – but bathing does. Bathing and thoroughly brushing your Coton while blow-drying, is really the best-kept secret. There really is not that much difference in the time involved, whether you are sitting for an hour trying to comb through the dry coat or you are sitting for an hour blow-drying. When the coat is clean there is less friction. Even if you are misting the coat while brushing a less than clean coat, the friction from static, dirt, debris, and excess product left on the coat contributes to additional matting. Bathing your Coton more often through this period does not reduce the amount of shedding but greatly reduces the amount of 'difficult mats, and reduces the amount of coat loss from excessive matting.

During the coat change stage, pick up your dog each day and feel through his coat. If you feel mats or knots, pull them apart with your fingers. Pull sideways one way and then go to the other side and pull the other way. Keep pulling with your fingers until you get the mat worked away from the body. Once you have the mat unsnarled, you will notice that you have saved a lot of hair from being jerked out. Take the mat in one hand and your comb in the other. Using the end tooth of the comb as a pick, gently work the mat until it slides apart, then take your brush and follow behind until it all comes out. Be sure to also lightly mist the hair while doing this. I do not

recommend “oily” spray for de-matting. Oily products have their place, but that is another article.

## DIFFERENT STROKES: TWO WAYS TO MANAGE THE COAT

### 1. Daily Line Brush

This first method involves brushing and combing your dog each day with the line brushing method. Lay the dog on his side and mist the hair lightly or spray your brush with whatever spritz you are using. Make sure you never comb or brush a dry coat. Spritz can be a professional spray, water mixed with a very small amount of conditioner, or even just plain water. Try to avoid heavy petroleum products during the matting stage, as you do not need a waxy residue holding in moisture. This will cause excessive matting by weighting down the coat. Whatever spray you use mist the coat lightly, don't wet it down.

Once you have your dog on his side, start in sections at the top (midline), spritzing, then brushing with a light touch (with a pin brush). Once each section is brushed, comb through what you have brushed. Make sure you go to the skin, removing all of the dead hair and mats that have been left behind. Continue to work in lines, making sure each layer is small; the thicker the coat, the thinner the layers need to be. When you reach the legs, raise the front leg and using this same procedure, thoroughly brush and comb it, being sure to pay attention to the fine hair in the ‘armpit’. Continue forward brushing the neck, chest, and head. Now take the back leg and use the same procedure on that leg. When you are completely done on one side, turn the dog and repeat the whole procedure on the other side. Once both sides are done, stand the dog on his feet and proceed to the buttock area and the tail, then finish up with the chest area. Use the same line brushing method in these areas that you have done on the sides. When the dog is completely brushed out, take a big-toothed comb (long teeth with wide spacing), take the dog by the front feet and raise him up. Spritz the coat lightly all over and then comb the dog all over

his body to check for any mats you might have missed. Don't forget the underside. When using this method, I bathe the dog at least once a week, sometimes twice if the matting is bad.

### 2. Bathe and Brush

The second method may not be for the beginner, but may be useful for people who are used to grooming a Coton. Almost all articles on grooming tell you to thoroughly brush your dog before bathing, being sure to remove all mats or tangles. This step is not necessarily recommended on the Coton because it can contribute to raking out all the undercoat, causing more hair loss. If you are going to bathe your dog before brushing him out, you must complete the whole bathing and drying session; otherwise any mats that are in the coat will set themselves into more difficult mats.

When using this method, I sit the dog on my table and pull apart as many mats as I can feel. I then put my dog in the tub and give him/her a bath. I use a utility tub and a utility pump (recirculating pump) with a hose and nozzle attached to it. You can buy these as ready-made bathing systems for pets or you can make your own. This method does several things:

1. It simulates the old soak and dunk method of bathing, which keeps you from scrubbing the coat and causing additional matting.
2. Since you do not have to soak the coat before shampooing, it removes a step from the process.
3. It saves money on shampoo as it only takes 1 –2 ounces of shampoo mixed directly into the water, which will bathe more than one dog (depending on the level of dirt in the coat).

I fill my utility tub with 3-4 inches of tepid water with about 1 oz. of shampoo. I spray their coat with this mixture, being careful to spray underneath, and spray each foot (top and bottom) thoroughly. Lift their tail and spray their buttock area. If your Coton's coat is very thick you may need to gently lift sections to insure the coat is thoroughly cleaned. You can see the shampoo gently blasting to the skin as it separates the hair. Spray this mixture through the coat several times according to how dirty or matted the dog is.

If you do not have a pump and are doing this by hand, wet the coat thoroughly. Take shampoo that has been diluted down about 10 or 15 parts water to 1 part shampoo and pour it on the ends of the coat, not directly on the dog's skin. Work the shampoo through the hair like you are washing an angora sweater. Coton coat is fragile so don't scrub the coat or you will scrub mats into it. Alternatively, you can fill your bathtub with water and the appropriate amount of shampoo and let your Coton soak while gently pouring the shampoo over their body. The dirt will float to the top of the water.



When you are finished shampooing, rinse with tepid water and continue to rinse until there is no more soap residue coming from the coat and the hair feels squeaky clean. Squeeze the excess water from the hair then condition the coat. I use leave in conditioners, mixing them as directed on the label. If I use conditioners that do not have leave in instructions, I use about 1 -2 tablespoons of conditioner and about ¼ - ½ teaspoon of a silicone product such as the Stuff, Ice on Ice, or Quicker Slicker in one gallon of filtered water. Mix this well, putting it into a squeeze bottle, and pouring it over the dog's coat. Squeeze the excess from the coat then wrap the dog in a towel to remove as much moisture (without rubbing) as you can. While the dog is wrapped in the towel, I do their nails, which have softened from the bath water. I then place my dog in a wire crate with fans and a table dryer on top. In warm weather, I may just let them sit in the crate until I get ready to finish them without turning the dryer and fans on them. I let the dog get to the damp dry stage and then I take him/her to the table and finish with my stand dryer. Many groomers think that drying with cool air helps prevent the rematting of the coat. Some feel that the warmer air helps to separate and straighten the coat better (only use enough heat that it feels comfortable on your hand). Make sure you do not allow the coat to become totally dry before the finishing dry.

Using a Les Pochs brush for the drying process, I use the line brushing technique I described earlier, holding the brush very lightly. When I find a mat I pull it apart and then gently brush with the Les Pochs brush until the mat is gone. I use a good quality pin brush on those areas that do not have mats. I also use a Chris Christensen curved soft slicker brush, especially on the head and leg area. Sometimes, if the dog is not matted very badly, I use the soft slicker brush (again holding very lightly) all over the body. It does a nice job of separating and straightening the hair. After I have brushed the dog and he is dry, I take my big comb and go through him to ensure he is dry and mat free. If necessary, I take a good greyhound-finishing comb and go through his coat again, spritzing first. I use this bathing/drying about every three days, sometimes more often and sometimes less. You will know by watching your dog's coat. For me this procedure works better because I feel I do less damage to the coat by not brushing and combing so often. Most of the combing is done with the frequent bathing and drying. I also like this method because the dog experiences little or no pain. Brushing and combing out mats every day can be painful to the Coton.

Whatever method you choose, it has to be done consistently and with dedication, perseverance, and love. Good luck!

