

Close Encounters with The Mat Monster!

Jennifer Lynn Winship 1995

I can't think of any situation that provokes a more sinking sensation than facing a matted dog. Whether it be from overnight puppy coat blow, lack of diligence, change of climate, or an infestation of critters, the results are equally devastating. Our once gorgeous dog is now a felted mess! We have two choices....cut it down or face the music and demat it.

Once the normal wave of guilt passes, accept the fact that no matter what method you use, some coat is going to be lost and some of the remaining hair will be damaged. Call it retribution from the Shih Tzu fairy!

First, determine if you are dealing with a dirty or clean coat. Although the golden rule of grooming is never to get a mat wet, much less damage will result if you bathe the really dirty coat and demat it wet under a warm dryer. I've had the best success with dematting soiled coats using the following method:

Mix a half and half mixture of your shampoo and conditioner. Add this to your tub and fill halfway with warm water. Place the dog in this water, and simply pour through the coat with a bowl again and again, never touching the coat. Continue for five minutes, drain the tub, and refill with same mixture. Repeat pour through bath another five minutes. Rinse THOROUGHLY. Luckily, there is now a truly outstanding product out called GALAXY REVIVE which will virtually perform miracles. Soak every inch of the hair in Revive, gently massage it into the mats. Leave it in the coat and gingerly use a towel to pat out the excess moisture.

Now comes the agonizing part. Allow yourself several hours, depending on the severity of the matting. Neither you nor the unfortunate dog deserves unrelenting torture, so break several times to alleviate everyone's tension.

Section off a small portion of hair with clips and begin ever so gently separating the web of hair with your fingers. I find spreading from left to right in a fanning motion most effective. Tink light, feathering movement while working.

Listen. If you hear cracking, you're ripping coat. One breeder I know keeps an 18" square of black velvet in her tack box just to keep her aware of how much coat she is losing. She places every bit of hair lost on this fabric to keep her honest and careful—even when she becomes exhausted and bored.

Once you have worked every hint of a mat out with your fingers, use a pin brush and brush beginning with the outer third section of the hair. When you are confident this section is mat free, proceed to the middle third, then the part nearest the body.

If you run into a particularly obstinate mat, apply more Revive...you'll find an added advantage of this product is that the skin on your hands will be as soft and supple as its ever been.

If you're dematting a clean, dry dog, the process is much the same. Soak the cot in Revive, let it absorb for ten minutes, and use the same techniques described above. Spray each section with an oil and conditioner solution mixed with water. You may or may not find success with a warm dryer.

You can use these hours in a negative way, blaming either your dog or yourself for this disgusting state of affairs. However, frustration often leads to heavy handed ripping of hair. This does naught but hurt your dog and diminish your own self-esteem. Better to rent the video you've been aching to see, catch up on calls, or virtuously watch public television.

Our most fervent wish is that none of our cherished darlings ever have a mat, yet I can't think of anyone who hasn't faced "The Mat Monster" on at least one occasion. But if you make a commitment and proceed with a delicate touch, you'll end up with a dog who can win verses another "should be a champion" down the tubes.