

Havanese Coats & Grooming

Havanese are a double-coated hair breed known for being “non-shedding” and hypoallergenic. The reality is the hair does shed but the loose hairs often are trapped within their coats rather than falling out. This low shedding is often a great feature for allergy sufferers and people who don’t want dog hair all over their home. But with those benefits comes the need for regular maintenance as Havanese can mat easily.

Many pet Havanese owners will opt to keep their dog’s coat short, often called a “puppy cut”. In my experience sending them to a groomer every 6 weeks usually keeps the coat from getting too out-of-control. For those who wish to groom themselves, keep a longer coat, or stretch out the time between trips to the groomer, here are some of the tools I have found to be very handy.

Flea Comb



Metal comb



Dematting Comb Pick



Rake Style Dematting Comb



Chris Christensen Oval Pin Brush



Jason 7.5” Thinning Chunker Shears



I start off using the pin brush all over then switch to the metal comb searching for any mats. Don’t try to force the comb through the mat as this will hurt and eventually build up fear and anxiety over grooming time. Instead, when you find a knot that won’t easily come out, use the dematting comb pick points to pull apart the mat. The tops of the pick’s teeth are wavy designed to saw through tough mats. After using the dematter, try with the comb again which will often finish off and remove the mat. Really large or stubborn mats can be cut out with scissors or thinned with the chunker shears. Pay special attention to make sure you are brushing/combing to the skin as mats can hide beneath the surface. The Flea Comb is excellent for detail work around the face and getting “eye crud”. Finally, I found the Rake Style comb great for thinning out all that loose, but not yet matted, hair. I noticed Mama Dog (Boka) having a silky flowing coat after using this tool to remove the undercoat build-up.

High mat areas are under collars (we usually don’t have our Havanese wear them for that reason), where the legs meet the body, near the ears, belly area, and other areas of friction.

Do not bathe your dog unless they have been freed of mats beforehand. Washing mats cause them to shrink and tighten. There are a lot of great dog shampoos on the market, we like the Chris Christensen products, I've also seen Pride + Groom recommended. A puppy should be bathed using a puppy shampoo or even a human-grade baby shampoo.

Havanese, like many similar coated breeds, can have a build-up of ear hair that will need to be plucked. While this sounds super painful, unless your dog has an underlying infection, the process usually ranges from painless to mildly uncomfortable. The hair in the ear I'd describe as dry and crispy and breaks off relatively easily. You can use your fingers or a pair of hemostats (locking tweezers) and pet ear hair powder to give you a better grip. This can be something you do yourself or have your groomer do it for you. How often it's done depends on how fast your dog's ear-hair grows, visible signs of blockage, and your vet's advice. I usually just give them a peak every so often, pull out a few hairs and then check again in a few months.



Quick note – Havanese were dogs bred for tropical island life (think Havana Cuba) - their long coats are designed to keep them cool in the summer and warm in colder weather. They do not need to be cut short for the summer unless you want them in a puppy cut for ease of maintenance reasons. Havanese coats can be straight, curly, wavy, thick, flowy, floss-like or silky.

Help! My dog HATES grooming! What do I do!?!?

We've been practicing grooming your puppy every 1-2 days for the last few weeks to try to reduce their anxiety about the process. I've been combing their short puppy coats with a flea comb. If your dog is resistant, "freaks out", won't sit still, yelps out at the slightest pull, take a deep breath and realize this behavior is normal. Grooming can hurt! Dogs often feed off of our energy, it's best to be in a calm, relaxed mood before you start. Have lots of treats. Even if they start off tense, they often calm down in time. However, if they are not calming down, keep the session short. Trust will build up over time. Try again in a few hours or the next day. Maybe the first session will just be gentle brushing with lots of praise and treats. With more positive grooming experiences, the calmer they will be!