

## ALL-NATURAL GROOMING

While groomers are on the search for products, one of the terms they commonly throw around is “all - natural”. What exactly does that term mean? One can assume it means that it was derived from nature at one point, but the question is does it match their grooming style or is it just a cool buzz word?

All-natural is a term commonly used by groomers and shampoo companies, but what does that really tell us? If you think about it, hemlock and skunk spray are all-natural. Even the FDA does not have a definition for the term when it comes to pet grooming aids. In fact, they will even go on to say that the organic and all-natural labels have nothing to do with the safety of the products. Do not assume that these products are safer than products made with ingredients from other sources. If we are using plant-based products on pets, is that truly natural to the animal?

It is easy to understand that as groomers we want to do what is best for the pets in our care. Does “all-natural” meet that criteria? We are always looking for more “green” type or biodegradable products to protect our environment and our pets. Here is some food for thought. Does your “all-natural” philosophy follow through in other aspects of your grooming? Many times, the idea of “all-natural” only applies to the products that we put on our pets, but what about the other details of our grooming behaviors? If you have adopted the “all-natural” philosophy, then what is your stance on shaving down Pugs or Labs? Do you consider that natural?

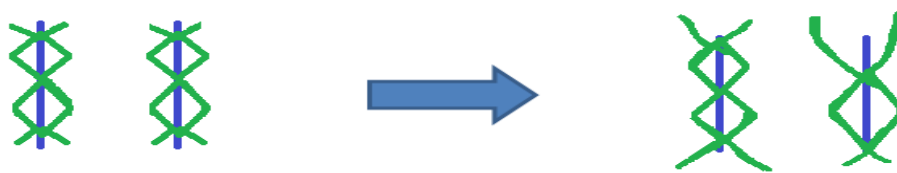
Often, we give mixed messages whether we realize it or not. In an ideal world, we should consider letting most of our pets stay in their natural state by preserving the hair that protects them from the elements. Notice that I said most, because various coat types have distinct needs and react differently. Two major classifications that need to be put forth are the difference of the pets that have a genetically predetermined coat length and those that are continuously growing (long coat type). The genetically predetermined coat types can further be broken down into short and medium coated dogs.

When we compare these coat types, they have quite different growth patterns, hair types, and therefore needs. When we take a look at the genetically predetermined hair type, the coat grows out to a specific length and constancy and then stops. As long as it is not compromised by shaving, skin disease, or hormonal issues, it will stay at that length for the duration of the pet’s life. We often will see in dogs like Aussies, Shelties, Goldens and Collies that shave downs will affect the coat’s future length and texture.

One of the other significant differences for the genetically predetermined hair coats and the long or continuously growing coat is how they function. In short and medium coats, the primary or guard hairs function very differently from the secondary hairs. The primary hairs are the main color and the protection of the skin as well as the secondary hairs (this is why they are called “guard” hairs). Primary hairs tend to be more rigid and less porous than their secondary hair counterparts. They are designed to shed water, toxins, and microbes. Secondary hairs lack structure and often retain water and toxins because they are more porous.

Short coats have different needs from the medium coats, because of their lack of density. They really need all the hair they can get for protection. These breeds actually produce more oils or sebum as another layer of protection. Shaving them down makes them extremely vulnerable to skin issues. This group is way overrepresented in the veterinary clinic, because of the practices like shave downs and degreasing products, which both go against the natural protections mechanisms thus increasing the chances of problems.

In the medium coated breeds, the “fluff” is much more prevalent, thus the reason they are called double coated. The secondary hairs (green) are more the insulation or fluff to the coat. The primary hairs are the structure of the coat (blue) and should extend past the point of the secondary hairs.



The issue when shaving or clipping double coated pets is that when you cut the primary hair shorter, you lose the structure and the secondary hair springs up leaving the coat uneven in some breeds (artic and similar breeds). By destroying this structure, we have eliminated the pet’s natural protection, which leaves the hair and skin more vulnerable to moisture, toxins, and microbes. These coats need a lot of minerals and nutrients to grow strong and healthy. Sufficient nutrition, not degreasing, good conditioning, and avoiding products that decalcify (like vinegar) are important to maintain these coats. Breeds like Chows and Pomeranians tend to be very susceptible to shave downs. Whether it be due to their hormonal make up (or changes with age) or long dormant cycles to the hair, it is not uncommon to have total hair loss and black skin disease or Alopecia X as a secondary issue to the shave downs.

In contrast, drop coats or continuously growing coats of our long hair type, is favorable to trimming and shave downs, because the primary and secondary hairs are similar. This similarity provides the ability for us to able to cut them down without the secondary consequences that we see in the short and medium coats. It is important that we don’t shave them down too far though. It is always best to leave an inch or more so that the skin still has protection.

And then there are the doodles!!!! They are really a class to themselves because they are a grab bag of possibilities. As a groomer you have to use your best estimation of the hair type of the dog in your care. Some cats also fit into these categories due to their mixed backgrounds. Most will fit into the medium length category, but if they are pure bred, they are much easier to predict.

So, if we are concerned in being an “all natural” groomer, perhaps we should focus on our technique as well as purchasing high-quality products. “All-natural” doesn’t have a sufficient definition for products, but I think we can all agree that by leaving the coat of an animal the way that nature intended it to be, we are truly practicing an “all-natural” grooming lifestyle!