

That Darned Puppy Coat!

Follow these step-by-step instructions to turn that problem puppy coat into the proper Griffon outerwear.



Photo Nancy Coffeen

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Photos by the author except where noted.

From the AKC Standard for the WPG:

"The coat is one of the distinguishing features of the breed. It is a double coat. The outer coat is medium length, straight and wiry, never curly or woolly. The harsh texture provides protection in rough cover. The obligatory undercoat consists of a fine, thick down, which provides insulation as well as water resistance. The undercoat is more or less abundant, depending upon the season, climate, and hormone cycle of the dog. It is usually lighter in color. The head is furnished with a prominent mustache and eyebrows. These required features are extensions of the undercoat, which gives the Griffon a somewhat untidy appearance. The hair covering the ears is fairly short and soft, mixed with longer harsh hair from the coat. The overall feel is much less wiry than the body. The legs, both front and rear, are covered with denser, shorter, and less coarse hair. The coat on the tail is the same as the body; any type of plume is prohibited. The breed should be exhibited in full body coat, not stripped short in pattern. Trimming and stripping are only allowed around the ears, top of head, cheeks and feet."

There are many different opinions on how much work should be done on the Griffon coat. Some say to strip or rake out the coat while others feel it should be left to fall out naturally. The problem with that second way of thinking is, puppy undercoat (and shedding adult undercoat) doesn't fall out by itself, it stays on the dog and mats. This article will discuss how to properly rake out and care for a growing puppy coat. Note that there is a wide variance in coats. Some puppies that have shorter, tighter coats will need less grooming than others, and the time frame on grooming/stripping may be months later. Pups with softer, heavier coats will need more grooming more often and sooner. But all Griffs need attention and regular grooming, even if it's just a weekly comb out.

It seems that the average Griff puppy coat starts to grow in abundance and mat at around four months old. The adult coat starts to come in, which means the puppy coat needs to come out. If it isn't removed, it will mat. I try to stress to all of my puppy buyers the necessity of combing their pups weekly from the time they pick them up until around 3.5 to 4 months old, when they get an abundance of hair. I suggest that they comb them daily or every other day, paying special attention to the beard, which gets wet and gathers a lot of debris, and can quickly become a matted mess within a few days.

The basic tools I use are a face-and-finishing comb (a flea comb could work as well) a regular medium/coarse steel comb, a Mars rake (12 teeth), a McClellan stripping knife (coarse) and a pumice stone. Oh, and really important: a mat buster!



The well-equipped Griffon grooming kit will contain:
 1. a face and finishing comb; 2. a medium/coarse steel comb;
 3. a 12-blade undercoat rake; 4. a stripping knife (coarse);
 5. a pumice stone; and 6. a mat buster. This stripping knife is a McClellan, but several different knives are available from many manufacturers in both left- and right-handed models and from extra-fine to coarse configurations. You want a coarse stripping knife for working on Griffons. The undercoat rake here is a Mars Coat King Stripping Comb. Other brands are available, and all come in different blade configurations. Pick a 12-blade.



What I like to do is to begin combing the pup weekly when it is 8 weeks. I use the regular comb, and then use the finishing comb to get out any other loose hairs. Pay special attention to the beard, front legs and underside where the hair is softer and will start to mat first. You may need a helper to help hold the pup to do the belly. I usually sit on floor and put the pup between my legs on its back; if it starts to fight, I just rub its belly until it calms down, and within a minute you will have a calm, relaxed puppy.

“... paying special attention to the beard, which gets wet and gathers a lot of debris, and can quickly become a matted mess within a few days.”

Around 12 weeks the hair starts growing more, and now I personally like to start taking out some of the puppy coat. I comb the eyebrows, top of head and ears with the stripping knife to thin it out some and keep it at a reasonable length. (I don't like mop heads!) At this time, I also start combing the pup every other day.

You may want to start stripping or raking out a pup with a softer coat at around three months. A dog with a harsher, tighter (better) coat may need to be done around 8 to 12 months, and then just once or twice a year after that to take out the dead coat. Yes, even adults will mat terribly if the coat isn't properly taken care of with regular brushing.

This diagram shows the direction one should use when combing and raking the coat: always with the direction of hair growth. Note that while the topline is raked straight back from ears toward the tail, the sides and legs are raked down toward the floor.



This 5-month-old pup is ready for some grooming.

The same pup, now 6 months old, after being combed, brushed and raked weekly for one month.



This 8-month-old Griff had never been combed.



The same pup one month later, after just two groomings.



An 8-month-old pup.



The same 8-month-old pup after one grooming. Much can be accomplished in just a single proper grooming session!

To strip/rake:

1. Comb hair out with regular comb.
2. Take the undercoat rake and start at top of neck and go down the body in short strokes. I start from top of neck straight down the back, then do under the beard to the middle point in chest, then I start going down the sides: from top side of neck down along the body. I use the rake until no more hair comes out easily. How much you take out of the chest and legs depends on whether you want to show your pup or not. If you do not plan to show, you can use the rake until no more comes out on chest and legs and belly. If you want to show, just take a couple passes on the chest and legs and belly to remove the excess dead hair.
3. The next step is the stripping knife. I make the same pattern starting at the top of neck and going down back, then along the side of the body. I again do this until no more hair comes out.
4. I also like to comb the eyebrows, top of head and ears with the stripping knife. Under the ears and cheeks, I use the Mars rake first, then the stripping knife to thin this out.

5. If your puppy still has a lot of very fine hair sticking out, it would be good to use a pumice stone. Just use it like a brush and in the same directions as before to take any fine hairs out. They will collect on the pumice stone and you will need to pick them off the stone as you go. Most of the time, these long stray hairs can also be easily plucked out by hand with no discomfort to the dog.

Note that besides getting a growing puppy coat under control, grooming is an opportunity for you to monitor for ticks, fleas, burs and other dangerous grasses like fox tails, so always keep an eye open for "things that don't belong" when grooming your dog.

Grooming as described here will not strip off all your puppy's coat, but be sure to stop with the stripping knife or rake if you start to see open skin, and just use a comb. I groom pups like this once a week for several weeks until the harsher adult coat comes in, and then about once a month after that. Maintaining a healthy coat is good for your dog and keeps them functional, attractive and presentable. And mat free! 🌟

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