

Malamute & Husky Grooming

Keeping your Alaskan Malamute or Siberian Husky in top condition is essential for his health and wellbeing.

Both breeds have a double coat, with a thick, coarser outer (guard) coat which provides a waterproof layer to protect the undercoat, and which will repel dirt, leaves, grass, etc. Under the guard coat is the thick, soft undercoat, which provides insulation from both the heat and cold, much like the insulation in the roof of a house.

Both the Husky and Malamute are comparatively easy dogs to care for and don't require as

much grooming as you might think. A good brush every day or two is all that is required, and provides an opportunity to spend time with your dog while checking that the coat and skin are healthy and free of grass seeds or other materials they may pick up in the garden.

Both breeds are very clean and will be relatively free of doggy odour if the coat is kept in good condition and not over-washed. They tend to clean themselves much in the same way cats do, and washing them should be kept to a minimum, once or twice a year at most, but if brushed regularly they may never need a bath.

Washing these breeds too frequently will remove the natural protective oils from the coat, which can leave the coat and skin prone to dryness and other issues such as fungal infections. If a bath is absolutely necessary, use a minimal quantity of a shampoo designed for arctic breeds that won't strip out the natural oils – a woollen clothing product such as Woolmix can also be used for this purpose. Make absolutely sure that the undercoat is completely dry after a bath, as any moisture left in the thick coat can lead to fungal infections and other skin complaints.

Grooming time provides an opportunity for you to handle and check over your dog, so should always be done in a calm manner. Use the opportunity to get your dog used to having his paws, ears and tail handled, and use food treats if necessary to distract and reward him.

Never punish or chastise your dog if he doesn't like being groomed as this will only make him anxious and likely to react negatively to being groomed, or even just at the sight of the grooming equipment! If your dog doesn't like being groomed, keep the grooming sessions short and fun, followed with a reward. Gradually increase the grooming time as your dog learns to tolerate it and that being groomed isn't such a bad thing after all.

Shedding and Trimming

Malamutes and Huskies tend to have a major shedding of the undercoat once or twice a year, although with desexed dogs shedding may not occur in such distinct sessions. This process can last up to six weeks from start to finish. All dead hair needs to be brushed out to enable quick and strong re-growth. A warm bath and a blow dry will encourage the hair to drop out evenly and easily – making it easier to comb out.

In their natural climate the arctic breeds do not shed during the year (except when they blow their coats) due to the cold and dry environment. But if you don't live in Siberia or Alaska you will find that the Husky and Malamute tend to shed throughout the year. Shedding is a natural process. Dogs perspire only through their paw pads so getting rid of extra hair in the summer is an absolute necessity to prevent heat stress. (Note that puppies go through a major shedding process when their puppy hair is shed and replaced by the coarser hair of the adult dog).

Overall the Husky and Malamute need very little grooming compared to other breeds, no trimming of hair is needed, just a regular brush to remove any dead hair. **NEVER shave, strip or clip your Husky or Malamute** close, unless required for medical reasons, or to tidy up the legs or belly of a longer-coated dog. The undercoat insulates against the heat as well as the cold, and the top provides protection from harmful UV sunrays and should not be cut short. The coat may take months or even years to recover, if it fully recovers at all. Never clip the whiskers.



Brushing

The key to happy grooming is to teach your dog to accept being brushed and standing or laying quietly while it is being done. Wild dogs perform grooming sessions on each other frequently, it promotes social cohesion and reaffirms the hierarchy – the same applies when we groom our dogs.

Regular short grooming sessions should be undertaken at least once a week to keep the coat healthy and free of loose undercoat, however daily brushing will be required during shedding times. This is equally important all year round, in summer the coat must be free of loose hair to allow air circulation, and in winter the coat can begin to mat if it is not regularly brushed, which reduces the insulating properties of the undercoat.

When brushing, start with a wide toothed comb or undercoat rake to break up any mats. Then proceed to brush the coat vigorously, following the way the hair grows. If difficult to get the rake or comb through the coat, part the fur so you can brush from the skin outwards (line grooming) rather than trying to brush through the thick layer of fur. To keep the coat in good condition, a large slicker brush does a very good job of removing loose undercoat and a pin brush can be used for the longer hair such as on the tail.

Be sure to groom the whole body, including the belly, around the neck under the collar, and underneath the tail where mats often hide!

Work on small sections of the coat at a time, and keep the sessions short and enjoyable for the dog, with rewards for good behaviour during grooming sessions. This will help your dog regard grooming time as something to look forward to.

Nail Cutting

Much the same applies to nail cutting – if your dog finds this stressful, distract with treats and cut just one or two nails at a time, with plenty of praise for good behaviour. Never physically restrain a struggling dog or handle your dog roughly when trying to groom or cut the nails, as this will only add to the dog's anxiety about being groomed.

If your dog does not like having his feet handled, train him to offer a paw for you to handle gently for a treat reward, without attempting to cut the nails. Once your dog realises that having his feet handled is a good thing, you can then progress to cutting a nail or two to start off with.

Here are some nail cutting tips:

- Trim nails outside or in a well-lit area – back lighting the nail with a torch can also help.
- If you need glasses for reading, use them for toenail clipping too.
- It's actually easier to see the nail structures on pigmented nails than on white ones. The insensitive nail will show as a chalky ring around the sensitive quick.
- Keep clipper blades almost parallel to the nail – never cut across the finger.
- Remember, no dog ever died from a bleeding toenail. If you accidentally trim the nail too short, give a yummy treat right away to distract the dog. The bleeding can often be stopped by applying Flour Baking Soda or a bar of soap on the cut nail and keeping the pressure for a few minutes.
- Don't squeeze the toes – that hurts! Use your fingers to separate the toes for clipping and hold the paw gently.
- Make nail trimming fun: always associate nail cutting with treats and praise.
- For maintenance, cut every two weeks. To shorten, cut every week.
- If your dog finds it stressful, start with just one or two nails, and gradually build up the nail trimming sessions until you can cut all the nails at one time. Make sure nail cutting is done regularly and that you handle your dog's feet frequently to keep them used to it and not regard it as something to be anxious about.
- Take the opportunity to check the webbing between the toes and the underside between the pads for grass seeds and foreign objects.

References:

www.dogsnaturallymagazine.com

www.myhusky.com.au/husky-guide/grooming/

www.snowdog.guru/groom-husky/

