

# Grooming Your Rabbit

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## Table of Contents

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Introduction  
Before You Start  
Setup  
General Grooming Information  
How To Groom, All Coat Types  
How To Groom, Details For Getting Out Mats  
How To Groom, Details For Long Haired Coats  
Tools & Other Products

## Introduction

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Welcome to the wonderful world of rabbit grooming. Rabbits are meticulous groomers, but if they ingest too much fur, they can develop an intestinal blockage. Grooming helps to remove the excess fur from your bunny's beautiful body. It also removes any mats in the fur, which can irritate the skin & collect debris. Thus your grooming sessions will improve both your rabbit's looks & its health. And you will feel good about helping your rabbit. It's a win, win, win.

Note that this paper discusses how to groom your rabbit by combing & brushing. It does NOT cover the following topics: trimming nails, cleaning scent glands/eyes/ears, monthly home health checks, checking for parasites (fleas, ticks, mites), butt bath, urine stain, blow dry, full shave down, picking up a rabbit, holding a rabbit, turning a rabbit onto its back.

## Before You Start

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It is extremely important that you know how to safely & calmly pick up your rabbit. If it's always a struggle to pick up your rabbit, the whole process will be too difficult & you will end up not grooming your rabbit often enough. Also, both you & your rabbit will be stressed before you even start. You also must know how to safely turn your rabbit onto its back so you can groom the underside. If you struggle with this, it will make the whole process difficult & stressful.

Your rabbit must be calm for the grooming session. If you are comfortable with handling your rabbit, it will feel safe & will not struggle. I cannot stress this enough. Before you can groom your rabbit, you must be able to safely & calmly handle it.

Rabbits have different coat types: short, long (e.g., angoras) or a mix (e.g., lionheads). Short haired rabbits should be groomed once a week. Ideally, long haired rabbits should be groomed once a day, but every other day is ok. For all types of fur, when there is a heavy shed (which

can happen 0 - 4 times a year) you should groom daily or even multiple times a day. The more often you groom, the shorter the session & the less stress for you & your rabbit.

Groom only dry fur. If the fur is wet, grooming will damage the fur.

## **Setup**

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Choose a room where it's easy to clean up the fur. A kitchen or bathroom works well. It's good to use a room that your rabbit is not familiar with, since when there are new surroundings, they are less likely to try to run away. Make sure there are no loud noises or distraction, e.g., other pets. It's handy to put a smock or old T-shirt over your shirt & put a blanket on your lap so you don't have to change your clothes. No need to wash the smock & blanket every day. When you do wash them, first brush them with a lint brush to remove the fur.

Use a comfortable chair with no arms, or a stool. This helps to prevent your rabbit from trying to run away. You'll have your rabbit on your blanket covered lap. Another option is to use a table. In this case, you'll be standing, so make sure it's a good height, where you don't have to lean over. Waist height works well. Put a blanket on the table. You can rotate the blanket to rotate your rabbit. Do not let your rabbit jump off the table. If it's a large table, block off a small area for the grooming session with weighted boxes. Or you can groom on the floor, if your rabbit does not run away.

You want to make this an enjoyable activity so make sure you are physically comfortable. Have your clothes, blanket, chair and tools handy so you can quickly start each session. When grooming, keep all your tools within reach. Pull back your hair to keep it out of the way. Have Neosporin on hand in case you nick the skin.

## **General Grooming Information**

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When you have a new rabbit to groom, start with just getting your rabbit & yourself used to each other. Position your rabbit as if you'll be grooming but just pet your rabbit & give a few treats. Once both of you are comfortable with this, do very short grooming sessions. Build up to longer sessions. If your rabbit gets highly agitated, take a short break, or stop & continue the next day.

Try to make the sessions enjoyable. Give a treat before & after grooming. Give a short massage before grooming. When grooming your rabbit's back, position its head into your elbow to calm it. Or put a small towel over the head & eyes. If your rabbit is moving too much, put your hand on its head & groom with the other hand.

To position your rabbit for grooming the underside, turn it on its back & put it between your thighs with its head near your knees. Use slight pressure with your legs to hold your rabbit. While not as secure as other positions, this allows you to use both hands when grooming.

Another position for when your rabbit is on its back is to have it on your lap between your body & arm, with its head nestled into your elbow. This is very secure, but you have only partial use of your second hand.

When doing a lot of shaving, check the temperature of the blade by putting it on the palm of your hand. If it's hot, change blades, take a break, or put the blade in the refrigerator or freezer.

Before using a shaver or hair dryer, turn it on a bit of a distance away from your rabbit. That way it can get used to the sound. Gradually bring it closer.

### **How To Groom, All Coat Types**

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The skin on a rabbit is extremely delicate. You must be very gentle when grooming your rabbit. Do NOT pull on the skin. Use a light touch. Comb thin layers of fur at a time. Start at the tips & gradually progress towards the skin. Work on small sections of fur. Use short strokes. Hold the skin with one hand while combing with the other so you don't pull the skin. Brush in the direction of the fur (unless removing mats).

Hold the comb horizontally (flat against the coat). With each stroke, rotate the comb up at a 45 degree angle, like scooping ice cream. This allows you to make short strokes. When using the Hair Buster comb, remove the fur from the comb frequently. The rubber band has to contact the fur in order to remove it.

If your rabbit is having a heavy shed, there will be tufts of fur sticking out. First pet your rabbit in its favorite place (e.g., on the forehead). Then run your hands all over its body (for distraction). While doing this, surreptitiously pull out the tufts of fur with your fingers. Alternate petting, rubbing, pulling.

Then use the Hair Buster comb. Start on the back, at the highest point of the rear end. This area usually needs grooming the most & is the least sensitive. Use short strokes as described above. As you make your way down toward the tail, move the skin away from the tail to expose more of the fur to groom. Move skin, comb, position hand lower, move skin, comb, etc. all the way to the tail. If the area on the back just above the tail needs to be shaved, be sure you know where the tail starts. Cover the tail with your hand to protect it.

After that, go to the base of the head & comb to the original starting point (highest point of rear end). Then move down each side to comb the entire body & sides. Finish by combing the top of the tail. Be careful not to hurt the last joint of the tail.

Now it's time to turn your rabbit onto its back to access the underside. Secure your rabbit as described above. The bottom of the tail is often thick with fur that should be removed. It might not look matted, but start pulling gently with your fingers & you might be surprised at how much fur is actually loose there.

Use a small comb to remove tangles & mats that are on the bottoms of the paws. If there are mats here, it's like walking on rocks. Be sure you get them all out. But preserve as much of the fur as you can.

Use a small slicker brush to groom the underside. Brush the genital area. Cover the genitals with your thumb while doing this. This area is very sensitive so be very gentle. Brush around the tail area, belly, chest and insides of legs. This is another sensitive area. There is a web of skin under the front legs. Be careful there if shaving. Brush under the chin. If the dewlap needs to be shaved, be aware that it has folds of skin, so pull the skin tight before shaving.

If your rabbit's poop tends to get stuck in the genital & belly areas, these areas can be shaved. Leave a bit of fur to protect the skin.

Turn your rabbit right side up & use a flea comb, eyebrow brush or toothbrush to groom areas with short fur. This includes the face (cover the eyes with your other hand, use slight downward pressure to keep rabbit still), ears, behind the ears, tops of legs & paws. If you need to trim a bit on the face, be careful to not cut the whiskers.

After grooming, there is probably a smattering of loose fur on your rabbit. Wet your palms & run them over your rabbit. The loose fur will stick to your hands.

Summary:

back, sides, top of tail

(underside) bottom of tail, bottoms of paws, genital area, around tail, belly, chest, inside of legs, under chin

(right side up) face, ears, behind ears, tops of legs & paws

### **How To Groom, Details For Getting Out Mats**

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Divide & conquer are the key words here. The smaller the mat, the easier it is to get it out. Work around the edges & then make your way to the center. If there is crusty poop, break it into smaller pieces with your fingers before brushing it out. For loose mats, pull them apart with your fingers. Pull horizontally so you don't pull the skin. Then work on the mats with a wide toothed comb or pick, starting from the tips & working toward the skin. Hold the skin so it doesn't pull. If the mat slips through the comb or pick, then use the slicker brush, brushing in all directions.

For mats that are only attached by a few hair, hold the few hairs near the skin. Slowly pull the mat out with your fingers.

For tighter mats, use a triangular shaped slicker brush without coated tips. These bare wires are easier to get into the mat. But don't let them touch the skin. Use a tapestry needle (eye end) to stick into the mat near the edge & pull it toward the edge to break up the mat. Cut off

the sides of the mat to make it smaller. Using the tips of the scissors, make tiny cuts from the edge toward the center of the mat to make it easier to brush out.

If the mat is very tight (like felt) it must be removed by cutting or shaving. When cutting out a mat, first work a comb between the mat & the skin, then cut the mat. This will ensure you don't cut the skin.

Removing mats under the chin are tricky. One method is to put the rabbit on its back with its head in your elbow. Gently hold the front legs down so they point toward the tail. You can now access under the chin. Another option is to hold the rabbit with all paws on the table & hold the chin up for access.

To hold the rabbit to remove mats from between the hind legs, put the rabbit on its back with its head under your elbow & also put the front legs under your elbow. You can now access between the rear legs & the belly.

Summary: divide & conquer, use fingers, wide toothed comb, pick, slicker brush (tips coated & non-coated), tapestry needle, scissors, shaver.

### **How To Groom, Details For Long Haired Coats**

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If there is hay or other debris in the fur, pull it out with your fingers or slicker brush, brushing just the tips of the fur.

Optionally fluff the fur before grooming. Use a hair dryer on high speed, cool temperature. Blow in all directions to fluff it & remove dander & debris. At the same time, comb with a wide toothed comb or pick. Do not blow into the eyes or ears (use hand to cover them). If you can't see the skin, there is probably a mat there that needs work.

Comb using a wide toothed comb, a comb with multi length teeth or a pick. Start combing the tips of the fur, working toward the skin using short strokes. Comb the entire rabbit as described in this paper.

There are two ways to proceed: bottom up & top down. For bottom up, starting at the bottom (where the fur touches the table), pull up all the fur. Let down a small amount & comb that in the direction of the fur. Let down more & comb. Continue all the way to the top (backbone).

For top down, part the fur at the backbone to see the skin. Comb what you can see, in the direction of the fur. Make another part farther down. Comb. Continue all the way to the bottom (where the fur touches the table).

If fur is getting into the eyes & causing irritation, trim the fur around the eyes with scissors. Do not cut the eye lashes. It is ok to trim the fur around the sides of the paws but do not trim the fur under the paws, unless they are densely matted.

If you need to shave portions of the fur, part the fur to see the skin. Grab a bit of fur & pull gently away from the part & shave the section you are holding.

If you want to shave the entire rabbit for easier maintenance, you can do that with a shaver or scissors leaving the fur about 1 inch (2.5 cm) long. This would be done about four times a year. If the rabbit is in a cold area after shaving, consider putting dog pajamas on it.

The Hair Buster comb is usually not used on long fur.

## **Tools & Other Products**

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All tools & other products mentioned in this document are listed here. Some brands are listed, as they are the only company that makes that specific product. For other items, the brand does not matter. The links are shown so you can see what the products look like. Feel free to buy the product from the brick & mortar or online store of your choice. Note that links & products may change over time.

The following are products that are not recommended. However, if you want to use them, then go for it. Rubber slicker (e.g., zoom groom) or glove brush. These do not get out enough of the undercoat and some are hard to clean. It's ok to use to get your rabbit accustomed to grooming, but does not remove much fur. It might look like it's removing a lot of fur, but there's still a lot left. Don't be complacent & only use this. It's not doing the job. Pin brush does not get out enough of the undercoat. Nylon brush just gets the loose fur on the surface. Mat rake can easily pull & damage the skin. FURminator has too many stories about cutting & tearing the skin of rabbits.

\*\*\* Essential for all coat types \*\*\*\*\*

Hair Buster comb

best for removing the undercoat

<https://www.amazon.com/Small-Pet-Select-HairBuster-Comb/dp/B06ZZXF81G/>

Li'l Pals small slicker brush with coated tips (slicker brush)

best for loose mats

<https://www.amazon.com/Pals-Slicker-Brush-Coated-Pins/dp/B000039TE6/>

fleece blanket

for your lap or table

many buying options

Neosporin (Original NOT +Pain)

nicks in skin

<https://www.amazon.com/Neosporin-Original-Antibiotic-Infection-Prevention/dp/B00164IUI/>

\*\*\* Essential for long coat types \*\*\*\*\*

wide toothed comb

best for long coat types

<https://www.amazon.com/Rounded-Stainless-Removing-Grooming-Deshedding/dp/B085DXND21/>

scissors, blunt tip

rounded tip to help reduce injury

remove mats

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B0053V5VKK/>

\*\*\* Nice to have for all coat types \*\*\*\*\*

Li'l Pals small comb

great for under the paws & face

<https://www.amazon.com/LilPals-W6201-Pals-Shedding-Comb/dp/B00003EJNW/>

lint brush

handle offset so you always know which direction to brush

<https://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B001I2ER7G/>

\*\*\* Nice to have for long coat types \*\*\*\*\*

fish comb pick

great for long coat types

<https://www.amazon.com/Diane-Fish-Comb-Assorted-Colors/dp/B001A1TXPG/>

wide toothed comb with multi length rotating teeth

good for long coat types

<https://www.amazon.com/Evolution-Shedding-Comb-Rotating-Teeth/dp/B0002DIS4K/>

comb with multi length teeth

good for long coat types

<https://www.amazon.com/Safari-Pet-Products-Shedding-Accessories/dp/B0002AQUSE/>

wide toothed comb (2 sizes)

nice to have 2 sizes

<https://www.amazon.com/Cafhelp-Stainless-Removing-Professional-Grooming/dp/B07V5M8LBT/>

\*\*\* For those who want to have all the tools \*\*\*\*\*

\*\*\* or who groom a lot of rabbits

Wahl MiniArco shaver

remove mats, cut fur shorter

<https://www.amazon.com/Wahl-Professional-Animal-MiniArco-8787-450A/dp/B000634JDU/>

hair dryer  
fluff long coat types  
be sure has cool button you don't have to hold down  
quiet as possible  
many buying options

flea comb, plastic  
sensitive areas like legs  
<https://www.amazon.com/zYoung-Packs-Combs-Double-Grooming/dp/B07KW7CL2B/>

eyebrow brush  
small sensitive areas like face  
<https://www.amazon.com/Eyelash-Comb-Eyebrow-brush-Brush/dp/B08LPQ8WJ6/>

toothbrush  
sensitive areas like legs  
many buying options

triangular slicker brush  
tight mats  
this link is very expensive so it is just to show the product  
<https://www.amazon.com/NFEGSIYA-Grooming-Shedding-Supplies-Accessories/dp/B09P3J2QD1/>

tapestry needle  
break apart tight mats  
<https://www.amazon.com/Bohin-Tapestry-Hand-Needles-Size/dp/B004NLW59G/>

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