

Grooming & Evaluating Wool In Wool Rabbits



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There are 7 different wool breeds recognized by ARBA (American Rabbit Breeders Association). Each of these breeds needs regular grooming care. Some lines may have coats that mat easy, others have coats that almost never mat. Get to know your rabbit and your lines, and increase or decrease the amount of grooming listed in this article as needed for your rabbit.

Grooming items needed:

- Small slicker brush. Please do not use a wire one, as the wire pieces can come loose and get tangled in the wool. Plastic cat ones works well.
- Dog flea comb. Get one with metal tines, plastic will break.
- Dog comb. Get one with wide spaced, thick metal tines.
- Small pair of scissors. Sewing ones work best. Make sure they are sharp, dull ones will not cut well.
- Seam ripper.
- Cat nail clippers.
- Dog grooming blower or Shop-Vac that is reversible (if you have English or Giant Angoras, or show your rabbits).
- Face mask if blowing rabbits coats (recommended, dander flies everywhere).
- Clippers (Scissors will work if cannot get clippers)

Many of these things can be found at Walmart. Serious show breeders only use a blower, and the dog comb only on mats. The more you brush a rabbit, the more it's coat will mat. A blower pulls the fibers apart and blows the dander out of the coat. Brushing will not remove dander. If you just have a pet Angora you can just use brushes, but if have many Angoras, or are showing them, you will want to get a blower.

Problem areas in all breeds:

- Armpits
- Behind the ears
- By the tail
- Under the chin

These are the areas you want to watch and groom the most.

I recommend getting your Angoras from a responsible breeder. These breeders have been working on the lines for a long time and will have the correct coat for the breed. Many breeders are working towards easy care coats. Poorly bred animals will have coats that will mat no matter how often you groom. These animals need someone experienced in grooming Angoras and are not recommended for first time Angora owners.

-Molting Breeds Care-

A molting breed is a breed that will shed their coat about every 3-4 months and their coat must be plucked or sheared when this happens (Never shear a Lionhead, their coat will not grow back the same). There are some lines of non molters in mostly molting breeds and vice versa, so please watch your rabbit to learn what kind it is. To groom a molter, use a blower at least weekly on show animals. If you don't have a blower, use a wide tooth comb to brush through the wool. Be careful to not drag the comb across the rabbits skin. A good quality molter should have an easy care coat that does not mat often. To harvest a molter's coat, you can pluck or shear. Plucking is deshedding the rabbit. To pluck, grab the ends of a small section of coat and gently pull. If the wool comes right out, your rabbit is molting and is ready to pluck. Do this to the entire coat. Most spinners want plucked rather than sheared fiber. To shear your Angora with scissors, start by sliding a comb between the scissors and the rabbit's skin. Rabbit skin is very thin and is easy to nick. To tell if your molter is molting, see if you can pluck a small section of its coat. If the wool comes out easily, your rabbit is molting. Other signs of molting include: lightened coat (tips of coat will look almost white), new wool coming in (it will look like a ring of short wool under the long wool, can be seen when blowing into the coat), wool all over the cage, and/or the rabbit's coat seems to be getting shorter. Your rabbit needs to have its coat removed when it starts molting, otherwise it can get wool block (wool blocks the intestines, can be fatal). A new coat will grow back in. Most molters do not need their belly or under their tail area clipped, as most are supposed to have normal fur there (Molting breeds that have wool on their bellies are American Fuzzy Lops, and some Jersey Woolies and Lionheads). Sometimes, however, they do get mats down there, so make sure to check that area and the other problem areas listed above. Juniors of molting breeds tend to have softer coats that tend to mat more often. For most molting breeds, breeders shear the coats on kits between 8 and 10 weeks (Never clip a Lionhead, their coats will not grow back in right). Their coats will grow back in with more guard hairs than the baby coat and won't mat as easily.

-Non-Molting Breed Care-

Non-molting breeds do not shed. Their coats just keep growing. You do not have to remove the coat at a certain time, but it is best to clip them once it gets too long for the rabbit to be able to groom itself. You can usually tell when its too long as the rabbit will start to get a dirty bottom. Baby coats should be clipped at around 6 weeks.

Non-molters usually cannot be plucked (some can, check with your breeder if unsure). You need to shear them. You can use scissors or clippers. To clip with scissors, use the same method as described in the molting breed care above. To clip a rabbit, make sure to get a good set of animal clippers. Human clippers will not work. Start by setting the clippers up according to the instructions. Then turn it on and let to rabbit get used to the sound. Holding the skin taut, clip the coat as long or short as you want it (most breeders go down to the skin). The rabbits private area must be clipped often to help keep it clean. Use scissors for that area, and be careful of your rabbits nipples and testicles (if male). Do not clip your rabbit's ear tassels, they will not grow back the same. Junior animals tend to have a softer coat texture

Troubleshooting

If you do accidentally nick your rabbit, put some non medicated antibiotic ointment on it (The medication in the medicated ointment can stop your rabbit's heart). Rabbit's heal fast, and have strong immune systems, so you shouldn't need anything else on the if cut it is shallow. If it is deep, you can use superglue to glue the edges together. It should heal fine on its own, if it starts to show signs of infection, contact your veterinarian.

If your rabbit has mats, try pulling them apart with your fingers and then combing them out. If they can't be pulled apart, try combing them out (if they are small) or clip them. If your rabbit has mats close to the skin, use the seam ripper to cut the wool holding the mat in place. Go slow and be careful not to nick the rabbit.

Do not bathe a wool breed rabbit. The rabbit will mat, and it is stressful for the rabbit. If they have poop stuck to their bottom that you can't remove with a baby wipe (unscented baby wipes work well for cleaning up small messes), you can give it a butt bath. Just let the rabbit soak in a bathtub or sink with just enough water to submerge its bottom. If the poop is caked to it, you may have to use your fingers to break it apart (fun, right?).

French Angoras



French Angoras have the easiest care coat of all the Angora breeds. French should weigh between 7# 8oz and 10# 8oz as an adult. They are a commercial type breed. They are usually a molting breed. The Standard states that French Angoras should have the greatest possible density and it should even all over the rabbit. Density is how many hairs are on the same space of skin. The coat should be very thick, but should separate all the way to the skin. The coat should have an abundance of guard hair, the coat should not feel coarse. The underwool (wool under the guard hairs) should be heavily crimped (the crimp is what makes the wool zig zagged). French are a molting breed, and will shed their coats every 3-4 months. They can be brushed with a comb, but if you are showing French, you will want to blow them with a blower, as brushing causes the coat to mat and removes density. French can be plucked and are great for spinning. They should have normal fur on the belly, feet, face, and ears.

Satin Angoras



Satin Angoras are the second smallest breed of Angora, weighing between 6 ½ to 9 ½ lbs as an adult. They are a commercial type breed. Their coats shine, due to a hollow hair shaft in the wool. They have the finest coat of all the Angora breeds. The coat should be greatest possible density, but may appear less dense due to how fine the wool is. The wool should feel fine, soft, and silky. The underwool should be crimped and should balance with the guard hair. The wool should not feel coarse or hairy. The wool should be an even length over the animal. The sheen (shine) of the coat should be uniform over the body. They are usually a molting breed. They can be brushed with a comb, but if you are showing them, you will want to blow them with a blower. They should have satinized normal fur on the belly, feet, face, and ears.

English Angoras



English Angoras are the smallest breed of Angora, weighing between 5 and 7 ½ lbs as an adult. They are a compact type breed. They should have a very dense coat, as dense as possible, that should separate all the way to the skin. The wool should have a silky texture and fall free. It should not part over the back. The guard hairs should be evident in separating and protecting the underwool. Underwool should be crimped. They should have wool on their cheeks, forehead, ears, and feet. Most English are non molters, and their coats will continue to grow. As their coats are finer than other breeds, they must be blown out with a blower, brushing their coats will cause them to mat more and lose density. They will need their private area and sometimes their tail/bottoms of the feet clipped. If you are showing, be careful clipping, as their coat is supposed to be an even length all over. If your show English gets matted, pull the mat apart using your fingers, do not comb it out.

Giant Angoras



Giant Angoras are the largest breed of Angora, weighing 10+lbs as an adult. They are a commercial type breed. Their coat should be as dense as possible. Giants have 3 types of fiber in their wool, the underwool, the awn fluff, and the awn hair (guard hair). The underwool should be predominant over the other two types of fiber. It should be medium fine, soft, a gentle shine, and delicately waved. The awn fluff is a stronger, wavy wool, with a guard hair tip. It is between the underwool and awn hair. It should be longer than the underwool, more strongly waved, and end in a fine awn like tip. The awn hair is the guard hair. It should be strong straight hair, protruding above the wool. It should be very evident. The coats length should be even all over the body. Giants are a non molting breed, and should be blown out with a blower.

Lionheads



Lionheads are a dwarf breed. They should weigh between 1lb 10oz and 3lbs 12oz as an adult. Lionheads are a compact breed with a high headset. They are a molting breed. They have a coat that is different than other rabbits. They start out very woolly and as they get older, their coat sheds out, leaving wool around their head (creating a mane), and they usually have some on their flanks (called transition wool or skirt). The rest of their coat is normal fur. Their wool is not caused by the wool gene (II), it is caused by the mane gene (M₋). The length, thickness, and life of the mane is determined by modifiers. For many Lionheads, their manes will not last their whole life. Their mane should have a medium soft texture and have evident crimp. Juniors may have softer wool. Guard hairs may be present, but should not cause a coarse felling to the wool. The mane should have the greatest possible density. They may have a wool cap. They should have normal fur on their back and between the mane and skirt. Lionheads can be combed out, but show Lionheads do best being blown out. Do not groom them daily, as you will remove density.

American Fuzzy Lop



American Fuzzy Lops are another dwarf breed, weighing between 1lb 12oz and 4lbs. They are a compact breed, with a medium headset. Their coats should be as dense as possible. It should be slightly coarse, with well distributed guard hairs. It is not a soft, felting type wool. Their coat should not be excessively soft and silky. Juniors coats tend to mat easily and should be plucked/clipped at 8 weeks. They are a molting breed. As they get older, their coat should be very easy care, requiring little grooming.

Jersey Wooly



Jersey Woolies are another dwarf breed, weighing between 1lb 8oz and 3lbs 8oz. They are a compact breed with a high headset. They are a molting breed. Their coat should be easy care, with lots of guard hairs. They should have more guard hairs than underwool, causing a slightly coarse to coarse texture. Juniors may have a softer coat than a senior, but should display evidence of guard hairs. Their coat should be as dense as possible and the wool should separate all the way to the skin. Guard hairs should be longer than the underwool. They should have a wool cap and side trimmings.