



Aug, 31, 2017

Your Irish wolfhound is nearly a year old now, which means... it's time to strip the puppy!

Either you know what I mean and the words fill you with the dread of suffering a root canal without novocaine or it just sounds like something tribal and maybe a little perverse. Come to think of it, either view isn't *that* far off, but... it has to be done, it doesn't have to be wildly traumatic and shouldn't require many stitches.

I'm talking about hand-stripping your puppy's coat — methodically plucking the longer, loose hairs out so the wiry adult coat can come in. Unlike some breeds, it can't be done with clippers because this still leaves the ends of the softer hair in the follicles, blocking the adult coat and ruining its structure. It's literally a hands-on project.

And, it doesn't matter whether your puppy is bound for the show ring or the fields and woods. A lush adult coat sheds rain and dirt and helps keep out mosquitoes. It also doesn't tangle or mat easily. In summer and winter, it gives your hound a welcome layer of insulation.

When's the right time? When those longer hairs "blow out," or begin letting go without resistance. So let's get to it. Everything but the beard and eyebrows must go.

First off, you'll notice your fingers are relatively small compared to a 150-pound wolfhound. You have a *lot* of territory to cover, pinch by pinch. Relax, this doesn't have to be done in one knock-down, grueling session. It's good to complete it within the calendar year, true, but you can take your time if you wish. Do it in short, relaxed sessions.

Find a spot on the couch or out in the yard where the birds can clean up the mess to make nests (many, many nests) from the wisps of discarded fur. Some dogs like our Oona enjoy hand-stripping. She lolled on the couch like the Queen of Sheba while the fur piled up. Others like our Oisin have to be peeled off the ceiling before the plucking begins.

It's best if you've laid the groundwork months in advance by regularly handling your puppy all over. Since this is an Irish wolfhound, likely you weren't able to keep your hands *off* the fuzzy little guy, anyway. This works to your advantage. He's used to your touch and won't jump

out the window with the first pluck. It may help to have a companion steady and gently restrain the puppy while you work.

As with any job, the right tools make a daunting task do-able. A friend and mentor of mine, Angela Forrest-Burge, gave me this list of go-to tools, most of which you can find at Amazon.com:

- A Chris Christensen T-Brush, 16 mm, for raking through the coat, straightening it and preparing it for plucking.
- A Chris Christensen grooming stone for finishing the puppy coat and removing the inevitable straggly hairs left behind.
- A Chris Christensen Michelangelo Sculpting Stone to help strip the face and ears.
- Thinning shears to trim the tuft of hair on the elbows.
- Ring 5 Hard White Grooming Powder, which, when sprinkled *lightly* through the coat, gives you more purchase when plucking. The powder is available at <http://www.rumbopet.com/ring5.html>.
- And surgical gloves, which give you a better grip.

When you're done, your pup will temporarily look sleek like a baby seal. And don't be surprised if he glares suspiciously at you for a few days. But a wolfhound can't hold a good sulk for long and his coat will feel fantastic. In a few weeks, the thicker adult coat will noticeably begin coming in and you've got *that* out of the way. Congratulations. You've got the touch now. You're ready when your next puppy comes along.