

Extreme Cream Siberian Coat Care

Cream Siberians and others with long fine coats are hard to keep up with but the secret of caring for this coat is daily care. The hairs of this coat are very fine, just a little bit wavy and tangle easily. The entire coat also sheds out on a continual basis all year long, but in a big way as the weather gets cold. This means the hairs that are coming out will tangle with the ones coming in and the result will be mats.

Therefore, keeping up with grooming on a daily basis is the best way to deal with this. Periodic visits to the groomer are not going to work. More on this later. Assuming you already have such a cat and that his coat is already a matted mess, let's start there. Here are the tools you will need.

There are three tools:

1) CAT COAT COMB: a metal round toothed comb available at pet shops and on line; NOT a fine toothed comb, NOT a wire brush/slicker brush, not a plastic comb; this is a metal comb with a rubber covered handle and an even straight row of 3/4" teeth.

2) SMALL SHARP SCISSORS: such as a bandage scissors or a sewing scissors. Blunt ended is good. Small for maneuverability. I use a pointed one myself and have to be very careful not to poke my Tuck. Mine is about 3 or 4 inches long with one inch blades.

3) FURMINATOR: this is essentially the bottom blade of an animal clipper embedded in a handle. It pulls out loose hairs without tugging on attached coat. They are easily available on line for 112 what they charge in pet stores. They are made in several sizes. Get the smallest one with a blade about 1.75" wide, for cats. If you go with Amazon do not get a used one. Buy a new one. The one I have has a purple head. The new ones may be blue. A note on the Furminator instructions: do not bathe your cat prior to using it. You'll make the problem worse. But do wash the Furminator (I use a toothbrush to clean the blade) periodically or coat oils and dirt can build up and dull the blade so it won't work well.

DO NOT get a wire slicker brush. Rubber combs are not needed and will not do the job. Do not bother with coat detanglers or conditioners. They are unnecessary and, if your cat is anything like mine, spraying it anywhere near, let alone ON him is a guarantee of non-cooperation.

Okay, now to the grooming.

Step ONE: DECISIONS

Take a deep breath, RELAX and realize that you are NOT going to get your cat's coat problem solved in one session or even in one or two days. The ONLY way to do that is to have your cat shaved from his neck to his legs in THE LION CLIP. If your cat is so totally matted that you cannot get a comb through any part of it, take him to a groomer and have him shaved. If your cat is so totally freaked out by any kind of grooming, you might consider having your vet do it under anesthesia to alleviate his anxiety, make the process painless and get the situation under control without further traumatizing your pet. We opted not to shave our Tuck. He was matted and resistant to grooming but not a hopeless case yet. If you opt to do this "lion clip" shaving, your next step will be step 5. But read Step 2 to determine if you should clip.

Step TWO: EXAMINE YOUR CAT'S COAT FOR MATS

Examine your cat. Find out where the mats are, how big they are, how far they extend and how close they are to the skin. If your kitty tolerates this without getting upset or biting or scratching you, you can move on to Step 3. If your cat gets upset when you handle him to examine his mats, turn it into a petting/scratching in his favorite places session, give him a treat and lots of love and then, MOST IMPORTANT: LEAVE HIS COAT ALONE UNTIL THE NEXT DAY. Try again to examine him and if he is still upset plan on getting him clipped. If you can't even examine your pet because he's too traumatized have him clipped by a vet under anesthesia. If your cat has very little unmatted hair but still lets you handle him, have him clipped by a professional groomer. When he comes back let him recover at least a day or two before going to Step FIVE.

Mostly you will find that mats will be under the arms and between the thighs and the abdomen and possibly on the tummy itself. Recognize that these are very tender places and be as gentle as possible. Mats pull skin and they hurt. This is why your cat resists grooming and wants to bite you and/or the groomer. Siberians are lovers not biters. If one is biting you, YOU are doing something he doesn't like or that hurts. Same thing.

Step THREE: SPLITTING THE MATS

Take your scissors and BEGIN to cut out and split mats. Splitting a mat involves cutting into the mat perpendicular to the skin, not along the skin. Be extremely careful not to pull on the mat while cutting and not to cut your kitty's delicate skin. If

your cat was upset the day before, select ONE mat that is fairly easy to cut and do that ONE. Then pet and love and leave his coat alone for a minimum of several hours, if not wait until the next day altogether. DO NOT try to remove the mats as you split. Just split them and leave them alone. Smaller mats which are NOT tight against the skin you can cut off the cat going parallel to the skin. You can also try GENTLY picking them apart with your fingers instead of doing any cutting. Larger LOOSE mats can be split from the skin outwards or cut out entirely. Do not try to pick apart the big ones. It not only won't work, but it'll take forever. Slip one scissors blade between skin and mat and cut outwards. If there isn't plenty of room for the blade, do not cut this way.

You are going to have to repeat Step 3 (in conjunction with Step 4 below) as many times as needed to prepare and remove all the mats from his coat. And you are going to have to do this in stages. It took us three full weeks to get Tuck's mats out completely. Partly, this was due to his fear of grooming. Once he realized I was not going to hurt him anymore, he relaxed and the job got easier. If your cat hasn't been groomed by you and has therefore saved the resistance for your groomer, you're in luck. You can now become his groomer and be sure nobody will hurt him trying to groom him.

If your kitty resists all your gentlest attempts to snip at mats, talk with your vet about getting some valium for the cat, and/or consider clipping. Part of this process is getting your kitty to understand that grooming is NOT going to hurt anymore. Ever. And a very important part of this process is learning how to handle your cat so that every time you touch him it feels good to him and he thinks it's a love session.

Step FOUR: FURMINATOR FOLLOW-UP

Take your Furminator and GENTLY see if you can remove any of the mats which you have split. Do NOT use the comb! Make sure you do not pull at the mat and hurt your cat. Just stroke the Furminator over your kitty and see what comes out. Again, this may take several days. Any time your cat gets the least bit antsy, QUIT IMMEDIATELY.

If the Furminator doesn't remove a mat, then cut that mat out with the little scissors. We spent a couple of sessions trying the Furminator and then gave up and cut every mat, large or small off of Tuck. This saved a huge amount of time and stress for us. Once all the mats are either Furminated or cut out you are ready for:

Step FIVE: MAINTENANCE

Assuming you now have a cat that has no mats but may look a little funny either because he has a Lion Clip or you've done your mat cutting, you will also have a cat that CAN be groomed without trauma.

Every day now, you will take out your Furminator and run it through your kitty's coat. You'll be amazed at the amount of fur that comes out every day. And you'll realize just how it was that your cat got so matted between groomer visits. If you've been successful, your cat will now enjoy grooming sessions. If he is a purring puss, he'll purr during grooming now because it feels good. Tuck's nickname is Evinrude after the outboard motor company.

After you have used the Furminator and you are certain that there are no knots or mats, THEN use the comb to smooth and fluff the coat. If you do this on a daily basis and you remember to stop BEFORE your cat gets upset, you will not have trouble grooming. You may not be able to groom the entire cat every day. So do the left side today and the right tomorrow and the tummy the next day. Just so you do some grooming every day. This lets your cat know that grooming is like getting petted and fed: it's routine and normal. It also keeps up with the coat enough that mats won't form.

If you are grooming your cat for the first time after he's been totally shaved, be very gentle and kind and stop at the least sign of upset. Unlike the cat that had his mats cut out and the rest of the coat left alone, the shaved cat has NOT had the time to learn that grooming doesn't hurt anymore! So start gently running Furminator and comb over his shaved body every day even if there isn't much to comb or nothing comes off. The whole point is to get him used to being touched gently and without pain by you and your grooming tools. And, the old coat while now very short is still going to shed out as the new hair comes in so you need to keep up with it just as if it were long.

Now for:

THE FINAL STEP

In the fall, your-up-to now mat free kitty is going to start shedding big time. And no matter what you do, mats ARE going to form. But if you have been grooming every day, you're going to find those mats immediately and go after them with Furminator, scissors and comb when they are small, loose and easy to remove. So instead of having a bunch of big tight painful mats by the end of February, you'll have a cat with

a soft, fluffy easily combed coat that is gorgeous and a cat who thinks grooming is love.

Written by Sharon Bowen, parent (with her husband John Bowen) of Heavnsent Sir Robin Hood who loves to be groomed and can be jealous of Heavnsent Sir Friar Tuck who now knows for certain that grooming IS love.

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Save the earth! It's the only planet with Siberian kittens!