

# A Beginners Guide for Grooming the Welsh Springer

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I was originally taught the basics of grooming a Welsh Springer by Mr. Harold Newman of the Pencelli Kennel, Treorchy, Wales following the purchase of my second WSS (my first show dog, Am/Can Ch Pencelli Tomas). Mr. Newman always tried to emphasize that there is no one way to trim a Welsh Springer. Everyone will have their own methods that work best for them, it is the result that is important. This article is intended to give you a sound, basic starting point. It is expected that each individual will develop their own methods which work best for them.

## **Beginning Notes:**

1. It is important for the grooming sessions to be enjoyable and pleasant for all concerned, both the dog and the groomer. It is better to make the grooming sessions short and complete only one thing than to "tough it out" and make the experience less than enjoyable.
2. You can, at times, see a Welsh Springer with several different shades of red fur (generally on the head, ears, neck and shoulders). This is the result of performing major grooming operations. If at all possible this should be avoided, if you trim the dog's fur **ON A REGULAR BASIS** and keep it trimmed, the fur will return to its natural color while keeping its neat appearance, however be aware it may take several months to accomplish this.
3. When using any kind of scissors, unless instructed otherwise, always trim and cut in the direction that the hair is growing (scissors parallel to the growth of the fur). It will take longer than trimming across or against the direction of hair growth however it will not be so apt to leave unsightly ridges in the hair. Additionally always cut with the pointed end of the scissors away from the dog's sensitive areas as sudden movements could cause serious injury.

4. Raise the dog to your level by placing the dog on a grooming table or bench, this will make it much easier on you (your back) and help keep the dog from becoming unnecessarily excited. To help keep the dog in position either have a second person hold the dog or obtain an attachable grooming arm for the grooming table/bench with a noose type lead (with a pull release catch) connected to the end of the grooming arm.

5. When lifting a foot to trim a toe nail, leg fur, or feathering be careful how you raise the foot. Always support the dog and never bend the leg/foot in an unnatural position. To do so may cause a serious joint injury.

6. Always use the best tools that you can afford; it will make the grooming much easier, the tools will last much longer, and in the long run save you time and money.

7. Tools you will need are:

- a. 46 tooth thinning scissors.
- b. Straight edge scissors.
- c. Hairbrushes (Fuller® Beech Club & Beech Club Gentler or equivalent).
- d. Combs, both medium and fine tooth (not the flea comb).
- e. Grooming rake, 16 – 18 tooth medium/fine (Oster® or Mars King® or equivalent).
- f. Magnet® stripping knife or equivalent.
- g. Dremel® with stone grinding wheel.
- h. Nail cutters (scissors or guillotine type).
- i. Heavy duty animal hair clippers (Single or Dual speed Oster® A5 with No. 10 blade or equivalent).
- j. Mat splitter.
- k. Toothpaste (Oxyfresh® Pet GEL or equivalent) and brush.
- l. Flashlight.

8. When you are using a clipper or grinder for the first time, always allow the dog to become familiar with the noise and sound of them **BEFORE** using them on the dog. Any mechanical device can produce ultrasonic sounds not heard by people. The combination of the clipper or grinder vibration, obvious noise, and unheard ultrasonic noise may cause distress if the dog is not allowed to become used to the sound. A heavy duty clipper or grinder is less likely to be placed under severe load and will cause fewer problems than light duty equipment.

**Lets Begin.** On the dog, I normally work from front, top to bottom and back, bottom to top. You do not need to follow this routine if it is not convenient to you.

**Overall.** Begin by brushing and combing out the dog's fur. If there are any matted areas or if any burrs are in the fur now is the time to remove them. Using the mat splitter, comb and brush, try to keep as much of the feathering intact as possible. Cut a mat or burr out **ONLY AS A LAST RESORT**. Using the grooming rake and stripping knife, now is also the best time to remove the loose undercoat and dead fur. Use the grooming rake and stripping knife only in the direction of the normal fur growth being careful not to damage the remaining fur. Do not strip the fur to the point of baldness or skin irritation. As you strip the loose undercoat and dead fur out the overall color of the dog should darken. (See Fig. 1)



**Fig. 2:** Removing the wild, fuzzy hair from the top of the head.

**The Head.** Using the thinning scissors and a brush; start from the top, front of the head. Initially brush the fur backwards to raise the soft fuzzy “wild hair” then with the thinning scissors and working toward the neck, remove the fuzzy, “wild hair”. The remaining fur should lay flat and smooth. Some of the soft "fuzz" may be pulled with your fingers. (See Fig. 2)

**The Whiskers.** It is not necessary to trim the whiskers however it will give the dog's face a softer expression. If a dog is to be used in the field some people prefer not to trim the whiskers as they believe that to do so will reduce the dog's ability to find scent in the field. Using the straight edge scissors remove the whiskers and eye brows (not the eye lashes).



**Fig. 3:** Removing the excess fur from around the ear canal.

**The Ears.** Use the clippers to remove the excess fur on the under side of the ears, paying particular attention to removing the hair around the ear canal. This will permit the free flow of air to the ear canal and will aid in keeping the ears free of infection and odors. Be very careful in this sensitive area as the dog is likely to try to shake its head and could be injured. (See Fig. 3)



**Fig. 4:** Be careful not to advance onto the neck.

At the base and back of the ear you will find an area which has very fine and dense fur, which if left, can become matted. Using the clippers, remove this fur being careful not to advance very far onto the back of the neck. (See Fig. 4)

Using the thinning scissors and straight edge scissors, thin and shorten the fur on the top of the ear leather to approximately 1/4 inch at the base of the ear to approximately 3/4 of an inch at the tip of the ear. Next shape the fur around the edge of the ear so that it follows the general outline of the ear leather taking care not to cut or nick the edge of the ear. When finished the ear leather should be the shape of a vine leaf with the fur lying smooth and with slight feathering. (See Fig 5 & 6)



**Fig. 6:** Trimming the top of the ear leather.  
Note: Hold the head up with your arm.



**Fig. 5:** Shorten the fur to approximately 1/4 inch at the base of the ear. Be sure to blend into the longer fur on the head.



**Fig. 7:** Blending into the longer fur on side and back of neck.

**The Throat and Neck.** Use the clippers to trim the fur from under the chin and down the throat and neck to just above the breast bone. Carefully blend the fur at the breast bone and on the sides of the neck into the longer fur. On both sides of the neck and under the ear there is a section of fur that grows in the reverse direction to the normal flow of fur. Be careful not to cut the dog when the clippers trim this section. It will appear to be too close; however don't worry, no damage has been done. Trim this section then blend into the longer fur toward the side and top of the neck. (See Fig. 7)

**The Neck and Shoulders.** If the dog has an excess of fur on the back of its neck and shoulders the dog may appear to be “loaded” (heavy boned, buildup of muscles, etc.) with bad shoulders and/or poor extension of neck. If this occurs, it may be desirable to remove some of the fur from the back of the neck and shoulders. Using the thinning scissors, work against the normal flow of the fur (keep the thinning scissors parallel to the normal flow of the fur). First thin the fur from under the surface then work out toward the surface. During this process remove a minimum of fur to achieve the desired result. As you continue with this process, use the comb to remove the thinned fur and to verify the action. The result should be the fur flowing smoothly over and following the contours of the neck and shoulders, reducing the illusion of excessive bulk in the neck and shoulders. Do not worry about the feathering on the chest and stomach areas at this time.



**The Toenails and Feet.** In the next step you will be instructed to cut the dog's toenails. There are two types of toenail cutters available, the guillotine and the scissors type. I personally prefer the scissors type as I feel they give me better control. An alternate method which I find the dogs actually seem to prefer is to use a stone grinding wheel. As with the clippers, allow the dog to become used to the sound or the grinder before proceeding. Being careful not to get the dogs feathering in the rotating grinding wheel, grind each toenail back to the quick. Remove only a small amount at a time on each toenail to prevent excessive heat buildup while grinding the toenails.

Using the nail cutter and grinding wheel trim the dog's toenails. For course trimming use the guillotine or scissors type toenail cutters then finish up with the stone grinding wheel. The dog's nails are the correct length when you can no longer hear them “clicking” when on a hard surfaced floor. If it has been a long time since the dog's nails were trimmed you may need to shorten them in several different sessions. Trim back to the “quick” (the pink “flesh” part within the toenail), wait several weeks for the quick to draw back and then repeat the process. As the length of the toenails between the front and back feet will probably be different, do the front feet first and then repeat the process for the back feet. Start with a nail that is white where you can see the pink quick, cut the nail being careful not to cut into the sensitive quick. Note how much you take off this first nail and try to cut off the same amount from each following nail. When you get to a black toenail, you will know without seeing the quick approximately how much of the nail to remove. It sometimes helps to shine the flashlight through the toenail in determining where the “quick” starts. Start by leaving the toenails a bit long then using the grinding wheel you can complete the toenails. Trim all the toenails (front feet then back feet) at one time.



**Fig. 8:** Trimming the fur from the bottom of the foot.

Note: The dog is being supported by your arm.

Cut the excess fur from the bottom of each foot so that it is even with the pads. If there are any mats of fur between the pads carefully cut them out at this time. Cut the fur flush to the bottom of each pad. **DO NOT** remove any fur from between the pads except to remove any mats, the dog needs the fur between the pads to help protect the foot. Next cut the excess fur from around the foot. Keep the scissors approximately 45 to 90 degrees to the pads while removing the outer fur from around the foot. Lift the fur from between the toes by using a brush and brushing the fur backwards on the foot. Cut it to produce a rounded, compact “cats paw” appearance. **DO NOT** place the scissors between the toes to cut fur from between the toes unless there is a mat. To remove a mat, carefully cut the mat out while keeping as much of the remaining fur as possible between the toes. (See Fig. 8)



**Fig. 9:** Blending the fur around the top and edges of the foot. Note length of toenails.

With the dog standing on the foot check that it presents a smooth appearance. Trim around the edges as necessary to achieve this appearance. To make the foot look smoother and more natural; it may be necessary to use the thinning scissors to blend the hair from the top and sides of the foot. (See Fig. 9)





**Fig. 10:** Trimming the feathering on the front legs.

**The Front Leg Feathering and Elbows.** The long feathering on the back of the front legs remains full and long, however it should not be so long as to drag on the ground. I normally remove the excess fur from the back of the foot and up the back of the leg for about one-half inch then cut and trim the feathering on the back of the leg so that it will not drag the ground. The feathering on the back of the leg will typically vary in length from one inch at the bottom to approximately three to four inches at the elbow. Sometimes, if your dog has excessive feathering, the dog can appear to have bowed front legs when the dog is moving directly toward you. Assuming the dog's front is straight this illusion is caused by excess feathering on the front legs forcing the feathering to flare out more than normal at the elbow. This illusion is corrected by using the thinning scissors and removing the flyaway fur from the surface of the fur at the elbows and if necessary from the inside of the elbows. As you continue with this process, use the comb to remove the thinned fur and to verify the action. Be careful not to remove too much of the feathering during this process. (See Fig. 10)

**The Tail.** Using the thinning scissors and straight edge scissors, cut and thin the long fur hanging from the tail to a length of about 1/2 to 3/4 of an inch. Be careful not to trim the end of the tail too short, making it appear bald. Do not cut the feathering if your dog's tail is not docked, simply trim the feathering to present a neat tapered appearance. Carefully cut the excess fur from around the anus. Make certain the dog is steady before attempting this as it is a very sensitive area. (See Fig 12)

**The Back Legs.** On the back legs, using the thinning scissors and straight edge scissors, cut and thin the long fur on the back of the leg from the foot to the top of the hocks. Be careful not to remove too much fur. The hocks should look smooth without feathering but not too close. The feathering on the back of the legs above the hocks should be tapered to present a neat appearance. The longer fur between the legs will generally not extend much beyond the top of the hocks. (See Fig. 11)



**Fig. 12:** Trimming the tail.

Note: Keep scissors pointing away from sensitive areas.



**Fig. 11:** Trimming the feathering on the hocks.



**Fig. 13:** Brushing the teeth. Don't forget the back teeth.

**The Teeth.** While it can be considered a part of normal good health maintenance, maintaining your dog's teeth is also considered a part of overall good grooming. On a regular basis (at least once a week) you should brush your dog's teeth to minimize the buildup of tarter and plaque, tooth discoloration, bad breath, and maintain healthy gums. This should be started when the dog is a puppy. (See Fig 13)

If a dog's teeth need to have heavy deposits of tarter and plaque removed you can use dental cleaning/scraping tools to accomplish this however if you are not experienced in doing this, do not try this on your own. Have a friend who is experienced or a vet show you how to accomplish this.

**Completion.** Completely comb and brush the dog again, carefully trimming any area that is not as smooth as it should be. Now is the time to look at the longer feathering on the chest, stomach and front legs. The feathering should be "tidied-up" but should not be manicured to the extent of other breeds by trimming the very long strands of fur to balance the feathering. (See Fig. 14)



**Fig. 14:** This Welsh Springer is ready for the show ring.

This completes the grooming of the Welsh Springer; however it really is not as difficult as it may sound. Keep the grooming sessions short and enjoyable and your dog will look forward to all the extra attention it is getting.