

Grooming your Greenstone Labrador Retriever

The Labrador Double Coat

Labradors have a **true double coat**, meaning they have two distinct layers of fur that work together to protect them.

The **top layer**, called the *guard coat*, is slightly coarse, shiny, and water-resistant. Beneath it is a thick, soft **undercoat** that provides insulation and temperature regulation.

This double coat serves several important purposes:

- Regulates body temperature in both hot and cold weather
- Protects the skin from UV rays
- Repels water
- Shields the skin from irritation and injury

The undercoat produces natural oils that help repel water and keep the skin healthy. If you've ever watched a Labrador dry after swimming, you've probably noticed how quickly water runs off their coat rather than soaking in. This water-repelling ability is one of the breed's defining traits.

Those natural oils are what keep a Labrador's coat smooth, shiny, and healthy — which leads directly to one of the most important grooming rules: **do not over-bathe**.

Bathing and Washing Labrador Coats

How often should you bathe your Labrador?

The short answer: **as little as possible**.

Bathing too frequently strips the coat of its natural oils, which can lead to dry, flaky, itchy skin and dull coat quality.

A full bath should be reserved for times when your dog is genuinely dirty or smelly — such as rolling in something unpleasant. For everyday dirt or mud, rinsing with plain water and toweling off is often sufficient.

Waterless shampoo can be useful for quick cleanups, but it should be used **very sparingly**.

When a full bath is necessary:

- Use a **mild, high-quality canine shampoo**
- Avoid harsh or heavily scented products
- Rinse thoroughly to prevent residue on the skin

Labrador Shedding

Do Labradors shed?

Yes — enthusiastically.

Labradors shed year-round, with heavier shedding periods known as **coat “blows”** typically occurring in the spring and fall. During these times, shedding can feel endless and impressive in volume.

How to Control Labrador Shedding

You can't eliminate shedding, but you *can* manage it.

- Brush your Labrador **at least once weekly**, and **2–3 times per week** during spring and fall coat blows
- **Never shave a Labrador** — shaving damages the coat and interferes with temperature regulation
- Feed a **high-quality diet** that includes omega fatty acids to support skin health and strong hair follicles
- Ensure constant access to fresh water

Pay attention to skin health. Excessive shedding can be worsened by allergies, parasites, mites, or underlying medical conditions. If you notice excessive scratching, redness, or hair loss, consult your veterinarian.

Skin Conditions to Watch For

Be alert for the following signs:

- Dry, flaky skin or dandruff
- Red, inflamed, or itchy skin
- Hair loss or patchy coat

Skin issues may result from allergies, nutritional deficiencies, thyroid issues, parasites, or over-bathing. Persistent skin problems should always be evaluated by a veterinarian.

Cleaning Ears

Regular ear care helps prevent infections, especially in active Labradors who swim frequently.

Step-by-step ear cleaning:

1. Gently hold the ear flap (pinna) upright to straighten the ear canal
2. Fill the ear canal with a veterinarian-approved ear cleaning solution
3. Do **not** insert the bottle tip into the ear
4. Massage the base of the ear for about 30 seconds — you should hear a soft “squishing” sound
5. Wipe debris from the inner ear flap and upper canal with cotton or gauze
6. Allow your dog to shake their head
7. Wipe away loosened debris from the outer ear opening

Only clean as far into the ear canal as your finger can reach. **Never use cotton-tipped applicators (Q-tips)**, as they can damage the ear or push debris deeper.

Trimming Nails

Nail care should be part of a **weekly routine**, starting in puppyhood.

Choose a method you're comfortable with — clippers, a grinder, or a combination of both — and keep sessions calm and positive.

Dog Nail Trimming: Step-by-Step

- Trim nails when your dog is relaxed
- Inspect paws for dirt or debris
- Secure your dog gently but firmly
- Clip the tip of each nail at a slight angle, just before the curl
- Avoid the **quick** (the blood vessel inside the nail)

- If bleeding occurs, apply styptic powder
- Smooth edges with a file or emery board

If You Cut the Quick

Styptic powder is the fastest way to stop nail bleeding. Be aware it may sting briefly, so hold your dog securely during application.

Grooming Essentials Checklist

- Wide-tooth metal comb
- Slicker brush
- Quality canine shampoo
- Waterless shampoo
- Thick, absorbent towels
- Nail clippers
- Canine nail grinder (Dremel)
- Styptic powder
- Canine toothpaste and toothbrush
- Ear cleaning solution

Introducing Puppies to Grooming

Preservation breeders begin grooming exposure early. Puppies are handled from birth, with gentle nail trims, light brushing, and ear checks introduced within the first few weeks. Puppies receive their first baths before going to their new homes.

Early, positive exposure creates dogs that are comfortable with grooming for life.