

NORTHWEST LAGOTTO

The Grooming Reference Card

Rustic, not styled. Spot-combed, not combed out.

The breed-correct approach to a Lagotto coat — built on the work of Katrien van Gemert, the Dutch breeder who literally wrote the book.

PREPARED BY
Northwest Lagotto
Lynden, Washington

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nwlagotto.com

PHILOSOPHY

Rustic, not styled

Why the Lagotto coat is misunderstood — and what to do instead.

The Lagotto coat is the most misunderstood feature of the breed, and most of the misunderstanding originates with groomers. A generic poodle groomer will reach for a slicker brush, comb the coat out fully, and shave the puppy short for “ease of maintenance.” Each of those three actions damages the working coat the breed standard describes and the dog is genetically built to wear. This card exists to give you the language and the framework to walk into any groomer’s shop and ask for what is right for the breed.

WHOSE FRAMEWORK THIS IS

The grooming guidance throughout this card is grounded in the work of Katrien van Gemert, a Dutch breeder and groomer who is the leading authority on the Lagotto coat. She was the first person to win Crufts with a Lagotto Romagnolo, and her book *Lagotto Romagnolo Grooming: The Art of Keeping It Rustic* is the definitive reference. She also publishes a YouTube channel, *Lagotto Grooming by Katrien van Gemert*, which we recommend as required viewing before your first groomer appointment.

Mark owns Katrien’s book and references it for every grooming decision in our kennel. If your groomer is willing to read it — or even watch one of her videos — you have likely found the right groomer. If they dismiss the rustic framing as old-fashioned, find another groomer.

TWO PRINCIPLES THAT GOVERN EVERY GROOMING DECISION

- 1. The coat should be spot-combed, not combed out.** A Lagotto coat is designed to mat lightly, in a controlled way, into a textured “wool.” Combing it fully out — slicker brush from the skin to the tip — destroys the structure that gives the breed its working-coat properties: water-resistance, self-regulating insulation, debris shedding. The correct technique addresses individual mats with finger separation and a pin brush, leaving the rest of the coat in its natural rustic texture.
- 2. Length is shaped, not shaved.** The breed-correct silhouette is short but textured, with hair length following the contours of the dog. Three-quarters of an inch on the body, slightly longer on the head and ears, even on the legs. A “puppy cut” that takes the dog to a uniform half-inch all over is not breed-correct and removes the very texture that makes the breed visually distinctive. If your groomer’s default is uniform short, your groomer is not the right groomer for a Lagotto.

MAINTENANCE

Cadence and routine

How often, and what the five-minute routine looks like.

Between-grooms maintenance is what keeps the coat in good condition and extends the interval between professional appointments. Five minutes every other day is the right cadence — more frequent than that becomes intrusive, less frequent allows mats to consolidate. The work below is what those five minutes look like.

FREQUENCY

Professional groom	<i>Every six to eight weeks</i>	Six weeks for a more polished silhouette, eight for a more rustic one. Going longer than ten weeks risks mats consolidating into the working layer where finger-separation cannot reach them.
Bath	<i>Every four to six weeks, or as needed</i>	More often if she has been swimming or rolling in something objectionable. Always brush before the bath, never after — wet mats tighten and become much harder to address.
Spot-comb at home	<i>Every other day, five minutes</i>	The maintenance schedule below. Long enough to find emerging mats, short enough not to disturb the coat structure.
Nail trim	<i>Every two to three weeks</i>	Lagotto nails grow quickly. If you can hear them clicking on hard floor, they are too long.
Ear check	<i>Weekly</i>	The breed has a folded ear that holds moisture and is prone to yeast and bacterial overgrowth, especially after swimming. Look, smell, gently wipe the visible canal with a soft cloth.

FIVE-MINUTE BETWEEN-GROOMS ROUTINE

The five-minute routine, in order:

1	Eyes and ears	Wipe gently with a damp soft cloth. Check inside the ear flap for redness, discharge, or odour.
2	Hands through the coat	Run your fingers through the body coat, head to tail, in the direction the hair lies. You are feeling for emerging mats — they show as small dense knots before they become visible.
3	Spot-comb the mats you found	A pin brush or wide-tooth comb on the mat itself. Hold the hair at the base so you do not pull the skin. Tease it open with your fingers if needed; do not pull through.
4	Behind the ears, armpits, hocks	These are the high-friction zones where mats consolidate fastest. Check every session even if the body coat feels clean.
5	Paws and pads	Trim long hair between the pads if it is collecting debris. Check for foxtails and grass awns in summer.

THE GROOMER

What to ask a groomer

Six questions, what good answers sound like, and the answers that mean keep looking.

The conversation with a prospective groomer matters more than the price. Below is the script we recommend you walk in with — the questions that tell you whether the groomer understands the breed, and the answers that tell you to keep looking.

“Have you groomed a Lagotto Romagnolo before?”

Looking for: yes, with specifics about the coat texture and rustic finish. Watch out for: confidently equating the breed with a Doodle, Bichon, or generic Poodle. The coats are not equivalent.

“Would you be willing to watch a Katrien van Gemert video before our first appointment?”

Looking for: genuine interest. The best groomers we work with are eager to learn breed-specific techniques. Watch out for: dismissal — “I know how to groom curly coats.” That answer is the answer.

“What tools do you use on a curly-coated breed?”

Looking for: pin brush, wide-tooth comb, finger separation, scissor work. Watch out for: slicker brush as the primary tool, or any mention of an undercoat rake. Both damage a Lagotto coat.

“What length do you typically cut a Lagotto?”

Looking for: three-quarters of an inch on the body, longer on head and ears and legs, with a textured rather than uniform finish. Watch out for: a single number applied uniformly all over (“half-inch”), or a default to a “puppy cut” that removes the breed silhouette.

“Do you de-shed or de-mat aggressively?”

Looking for: no. The Lagotto is a non-shedding breed, and aggressive de-matting damages the coat structure. Mats are addressed by finger separation and patience, not force. Watch out for: pride in being able to “get through anything” — that is the wrong skill for this breed.

“What is your approach to a coat with light, controlled matting?”

Looking for: recognition that this is the natural state of the breed, and that the work is to manage rather than eliminate it. Watch out for: shock or alarm at the idea of leaving any mat in place. The whole rustic framing is foreign to a generic groomer.

If you are in the Pacific Northwest, we maintain a short list of groomers we have personally vetted and recommend. Ask Tracy by email; she will share the current list. If you are elsewhere, we are happy to review a prospective groomer’s social media or website with you before you book.