

Taming the Uncropped Ear by Laura Munro

Uncropped dogs have a very pleasing look to my eye, but one thing that I like to see is a properly set and sized ear that lays correctly.

As puppies go through teething, their ears can get a little "wild". We expect our cropped dogs to have their ears set upright as they go through the taping process while teething and into adolescence. All puppies have cartilage formation as they go through teething. When ears are left natural, that cartilage formation can get out of control.

Some of my dogs have never had any problems with the set or lay of their ear as they go through puppyhood and into adulthood. Some of them have needed a little guidance.

The dog shown below has a high ear set and would have had ears that laid relatively nicely had he been taped. They most likely would have broken a bit above the top of his skull however.



If this dog had been cropped, I would have expected his ears to stand very quickly. His mother had a similar ear set and at 11 weeks, I decided she would best be cropped since I was going to show her. Her ears stood well before she was 5 months old.

There are several methods for taping uncropped ears. I've heard of people using

mole foam. I seen pictures of uncropped Boxers with the ears folded in half lengthwise and taped (see <http://www.raevon.net/TAPING.html>). I've seen techniques where just the bottom of each ear is held down by a strip of elastic on strapped from the base of one ear, below the underjaw to connect to the base of the opposite ear (see <http://www.6stardanes.com/ears.html>). I have my own method of taping and that is what I'm doing to describe here.

This is the sire of the dog shown above. I had to tape his ears twice to get them to lay nicely.



The method I use requires a list of materials as follows:

- Ear cleaning solution (1/3 water, 1/3 white vinegar, 1/3 alcohol)
- Ear drying powder
- Curity Kendall 1 inch adhesive tape*
- Engine starter fluid (spray can)*

And the steps for taping are as follows:

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1. Clean the ears very well. I use a homemade ear cleaner made from 1/3 white vinegar, 1/3 rubbing alcohol and 1/3 water. Squirt some in the ear, squish it around a bit, then wipe out with kleenex.

2. Put ear drying powder in the ears. You can buy this at Petco or other pet supply. This prevents moisture from building up inside the ear.

3. Take one long strip of adhesive tape and get it sticky - I use the engine starter spray from the auto store - it's ether in a can. Just hold the strip up and spray the adhesive side. I prefer to do this outside. Just make sure you don't spray it around any open flames!

4. Drape the tape over the head so that the end of the tape is at the center of the head and it is positioned on the head so that it will drop down the side of the head and just cover the front edge of the ear.

Here are some photos to demonstrate the process.



I use Curity Kendall adhesive tape (you can order from K V Vet), but I've also used the

Johnsons Sport Tape and that worked pretty good.

5. Now Wrap the tape under the dewlap and up the front edge of the opposite ear.



I basically tape the front edge of the ears to the side of the head and have the tape overlap under the dewlap. Make sure you don't have any "wrinkles" in the ears - you want them flat against the side of the head. The idea is to tape the front edge down so the fold in the back will form properly. The tape should be on the ear, right up along the front edge, not on the side of the head.

When it is done it will look like this from the side.



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From the back it will look like this:



The key for getting the ear to lay properly is to make sure that the fold in the back of the ear does not collapse inward. If that happens, the ears will look like this.



Note the difference between the two photos above with respect to the direction of the fold in the back of the ear.

I only leave the tape on for 48 hrs. Then take it off and see how the ears do. You can use the starter fluid to help remove the tape - spray a bit on a cotton swab and work the

tape off by rubbing it under the edge as you pull the tape back.

About half my puppies have never had any tape put on their ears and their ears lay very nicely. But for the ones that started flipping over the front of the head, I used this method to get them under control. I like this method because if only one ear is acting up, you can bring the tape up the side of the head on the other side and only tape one ear down if you want.

Put the tape on, leave it for 48 hours and remove it. If the ears start to go wild again in a week or two, you can repeat the process, but don't leave the tape on for more than 2 days.

Just like cropped dogs, some need more help than others, but the duration and repetition of taping the uncropped ear doesn't come close to even the quickest standing cropped ear.

If you plan to show your uncropped puppy, I recommend studying the cropped and uncropped dogs in the pedigree to get an idea of the length and ear set in the line.

Dogs with very high ear sets, can be difficult to deal with if their ears are left natural because they tend to break above the skull even if taped to lay correctly.

While I prefer to leave my dogs uncropped, I want their ears to be the proper size, set correctly and to lay nicely. If I am showing them, I'm even more particular and will take extra care to make sure the ears on the dog are pleasing.

*Some dogs can be sensitive to either the spray ether or the adhesive on the tape. Be careful to monitor the dog and make sure that there is no irritation.