

Field Guide to Telling Animal Fur from Fake Fur

With raccoon dogs being skinned alive and sold as faux fur on jackets, consumers and retailers need to check fur-trimmed products to ensure the material is really fake. Here are three tests that you can do to help identify questionable fur as real or fake. If you are ever in doubt, don't buy it. Other testing methods and indicators not on this list—including the push pin test, the blow test, the finger roll test, the color of the fur, the length of the fur, and the relative softness of the fur—should not be relied upon. This guide is not intended as a substitute for professional testing by experts in order to comply with applicable laws or for other reasons. Learn more at www.humanesociety.org/furfree.

1. Check the base of the fur for skin or fabric. Push apart the fur and look at the material at the base of the hairs. If the base material is not visible or unclear, and you own the garment, break the stitching and look at the non-hair side of the fur base, being sure to peel away all the layers of lining.



ANIMAL FUR: The surest sign of animal fur is leather/skin (usually white or tan, but possibly the color of the fur if it has been dyed).



FAKE FUR: The surest sign of fake fur is seeing the threadwork backing from which the “hairs” emerge.

2. Check the tips of the hairs for tapering. Both animal fur and fake fur come in many different colors and lengths. However, if animal fur has not been sheared or cut to a uniform length or had the guard hairs plucked out, you may be able to examine the tips of the longest hairs and see that they taper into a fine point—like a cat's whisker or sewing needle. Good lighting and a magnifying glass are helpful, as is holding the hairs up against a white surface.



ANIMAL FUR: Animal hairs—especially the thicker guard hairs (seen here)—can often be seen tapering to a point. NOTE: This test can give a false negative for animal fur if the hairs have been sheared or plucked.



FAKE FUR: This image shows the straight across cut of a fake fur “hair.” NOTE: Tapering has not been seen on any fake fur samples to date, but such a process may exist, or come into existence.

3. The Burn Test (only if you own the coat). Animal hair smells like human hair when burned; fake fur made from acrylic or polyester—the two most commonly used synthetics—does not. Carefully remove just a few hairs and then, holding them with tweezers above a dish or other non-flammable surface, ignite them with a cigarette lighter. Make sure to burn them away from the original garment and anything else flammable. Never conduct the burn test on hairs still attached to the jacket. The burn test should only be conducted by adults.