



Tips for Grooming Your Dog



Whether you opt to take your dog to a professional groomer, use a self-service dog wash, or handle all of your dog's grooming at home, regular grooming will keep your dog healthy and happy.

In addition to making him clean and sweet-smelling, grooming is a natural task that dogs perform for each other, just as their wild ancestors have done! When you take time to groom your dog, you increase his respect for you as his leader and strengthen your mutual bond. Please note that every dog has different needs when it comes to grooming; when in doubt, ask your groomer or veterinarian for advice or assistance.

Brushing

Supplies: Choose a brush well-suited to your dog's type of coat; for example, a rake may work best for a long-haired dog, while bristle brushes are a better choice for your short-coat canine. Ask your groomer for recommendations.

Frequency: Daily for long-haired dogs (to avoid mats); weekly for short-coated dogs.

How to: Always brush in the direction of the hair growth, working in sections. For a long-coated dog, mist his coat with water as you brush to avoid breaking the hairs, which can create matting. Get your dog used to brushing by starting him at an early age. Be consistent and make the experience pleasurable. If your dog is apprehensive about trusting your hands and the brush, go slowly and gently. Keep some treats in your non-brush hand to distract him. Stop brushing when he seems more concerned with the brush than the treats, and stop the treats whenever he looks at the brush.

Notes: Brushing removes foreign objects and parasites, controls your dog's shedding, stimulates blood flow, and distributes the skin's natural oils, promoting a healthy shine. It also prevents mats in long-haired dogs. If left intact, a hair mat will tighten until your dog's skin is pulled and his movement inhibited, resulting in severe pain and infection. NEVER use scissors to cut matted fur-you could seriously injure your dog! Rather, use electric clippers or special brushes, or take your dog to a professional groomer.

Bathing

Supplies: Use a dog shampoo and conditioner that will be best for your dog's hair type; for example, there are hypoallergenic shampoos for dogs with allergies, or try oatmeal shampoo if your dog has itchy, dry skin.

Frequency: Depending on your dog's coat, anywhere from weekly to monthly.

How to: Before a bath, brush your dog well and remove any hair mats. Never bathe a matted dog as this will make the mats worse. Wet him down thoroughly, avoiding his ears, eyes and face. Massage the shampoo into his skin, making note of any lumps, lesions, etc. Rinse his coat completely, then use a wet washcloth to gently wipe his face and the insides of his ears. Towel-dry him all over, including between his toes and inside his ears. Completely dry a long-haired dog to prevent matting.

Tooth Brushing

Supplies: Toothbrush and toothpaste made specifically for dogs.

Frequency: Daily to weekly.

How to: Again, proceed slowly. First, offer a little doggy toothpaste on your dog's toothbrush and place it in his mouth. If he likes the taste, you're ready for the next step. If he doesn't, try another brand. Next, apply toothpaste on your fingers and explore the inside of his mouth, without actually brushing. Then start brushing a few teeth at a time until you are able to apply the paste to all of his teeth-the enzymes in the toothpaste will do a lot of the scrubbing for you.

Notes: Tooth brushing curbs foul doggie breath, stimulates blood flow to the gums, removes plaque and tartar, and prevents gum disease.

Nail Trimming

Supplies: Choose from among several types of nail trimmers; some are more appropriate for very small dogs. Use styptic powder (or corn starch) to stop bleeding from accidental clips into the nail "quick," and have a file ready to remove sharp edges.

Frequency: Weekly to monthly, depending on your dog's activity level and needs.

How to: Slow, slow, slow! Let your dog get used to the smell and sound of the nail clippers and to having his feet held. At first, just touch the clippers to your dog's nail to see how he reacts. Trim the smallest possible amount of nail, praising his calmness. You may need to "distract" him by holding a treat tightly in your hand while you clip, then reward him with the treat when you are done. For some dogs, asking a friend or family member to hold the dog or distract him may also be beneficial. If you feel uncomfortable at all, stop and take your dog to a professional. Your dog may feed off your nervous energy.

Notes: Always make very small clips so as not to cut the nail's "quick" (area where the nail's blood supply begins), which is difficult to see on dark nails. If you are uncertain of where to clip, check with your veterinarian or groomer. Overgrown nails can split or curl into a dog's paw pad, causing lameness, pain and possible infection. Also trim your dog's dewclaw nails.

Cleaning Ears and Delicate Skin

Supplies: Cotton balls; water or ear wash (if recommended by your veterinarian).

Frequency: Weekly to monthly, or as recommended by your veterinarian or groomer.

How to: Warm the liquid ear wash or water, then gently wipe inside the ear with a wetted cotton ball (it's fine if your dog shakes his head-this helps to loosen the ear wax), followed by a quick swipe with a dry cotton ball. Depending on your dog's needs, you may want to simply use a dry cotton ball to clear away earwax and dirt; ask your veterinarian or groomer about what is best for your dog.

Notes: If left unclean, a dog's floppy ears (particularly long ears) provide a place for earwax to build up and for infections from bacteria, fungus or yeast to grow. Ear infections are very bothersome to your dog (it itches and/or hurts) and you (it smells really bad!). Certain breeds with areas of delicate skin, such as folds on the face, will also require a regular gentle cleaning.

Helping Your Dog Become Comfortable with Grooming Sessions

Go slow. Don't try to do all grooming in one session or by yourself. If your dog is uncomfortable, just do one task at a time or ask for help from a trusted professional.

Don't make a big deal out of a grooming session. Maintain a light and playful attitude. Overly reassuring your dog during the process may make him think there is reason for him to become anxious.

Introduce your dog to running water in the sink, tub or shower where you plan to bath him. If you have a small dog, you can create a grooming table by laying a towel on top of your washer/dryer or ironing board and then placing your dog on the sturdy surface.

During quiet times when your dog is relaxed and happy, you can help him become comfortable with being handled for grooming. Gently pat your dog on different areas of his body. Touch around his eyes and ears, move his legs, hold his feet and wiggle your fingers between his toes, lift his lips and touch his teeth, etc. Take your time with this kind of touch, and do it often so that it becomes an agreeable experience for your dog.

