

How To Groom Your Dog

The basic equipment needed is simple and inexpensive:

Bath or shower enclosure, non-slip mat for dog to stand on, several old towels or special dog towels if you like! Dog or baby shampoo (it needs to be mild so that it doesn't damage the coat), conditioner (optional but again this needs to be gentle and tearless), hair brushes and combs suitable for your dog's type of coat, flea comb, grooming scissors (to be used with great care!), rubber grooming mitt, flea/tick treatments if necessary.

It's a good idea to ensure that your dog has had a good walk before you set about grooming him. He will be much more co-operative if he has burnt off some energy before you expect him to lie still for a brushing. Prepare well by getting all your grooming equipment ready before you start and prepare to get wet - so make sure you aren't wearing your best clothes!

Get comfortable on the floor with your dog lying on a towel or dog bed and spend time brushing his coat. This is a job best done outside if the weather is suitable. The first job is to run your hands through your dog's coat to check for parasites, lumps or sores. This is also a good time to check your dog's ears, paws and teeth – if you have any concerns or if any of these areas seem painful you may need to make an appointment for your dog to see the vet. Using a fine-toothed comb will help remove fleas. If you find any ticks, they can be removed by covering them in Vaseline (this suffocates them) and leave them to drop off – don't be tempted to pull them as this will result in the tick's head being left behind and this can cause infection. (**Tick Removal Tip:** A School Nurse has written the info below -- good enough to share -- And it really works!! Apply a glob of **liquid soap** to a cotton ball. Cover the tick with the soap-soaked cotton ball and let it stay on the repulsive insect for a few seconds (15-20), after which the tick will come out on its own and be stuck to the cotton ball when you lift it away. This technique has worked every time I've used it (and that was frequently), and it's much less traumatic for the patient and easier for me. Unless someone is allergic to soap, I can't see that this would be damaging in any way.) Carefully remove twigs or other matter with a comb and use scissors if necessary. Next, prepare to brush his coat thoroughly. The purpose of brushing him is to remove all loose or shedding hair from his coat. Brushing will help keep your dog's coat in good condition as it helps spread natural oils throughout the coat and encourages blood flow to the skin. Take your time over this job - enjoy it as this provides great bonding for you and your dog. Keep talking to your dog, use praise and treats and try to make this a fun and pleasant experience.

If your dog has any mats, you may need to thin them out with a Bernina comb (the teeth of this comb are actually blades to cut thru a mat) as it is very difficult and sometimes impossible to brush through severe mats. Shaving or using clippers may be the only way to remove severe matting. However, this must be done extremely carefully so as not to cause injury to your dog – if you are not an experienced dog groomer, this job may be best left to the experts.

It is important to remove mats before your dog's coat gets wet as the water will make the mats tighter and this could be painful for your dog as the mats pull his skin. Be careful with your dog's skin and brush gently so that you don't cause your dog unnecessary stress or pain by pulling tangles and knots out of his coat. Only once his coat has been thoroughly brushed is it time to wash him.

If you are doing this at home, the easiest thing to do is to use your bathtub. It is advisable to place a rubber mat in the bath to prevent your dog slipping and to ensure that your bath isn't scratched or damaged by his nails. If you have a shower attachment, use this first to wet your dog. If not, fill your bath with luke-warm water (up to dog knee height), before you put him in the bath. Be sure that the water is not too hot as your dog's skin is easily scalded – remember this should be a positive and fun experience, not an ordeal! Carefully lift your dog (place one arm under his middle and the other around his front legs) and place him in the water. Use a beaker or jug to thoroughly wet his coat – never spray water in his face as this can be distressing for dogs. A regular warm bath can help accelerate the shedding process and this in turn means less dog hair in the house and less housework for you.

Now apply the dog shampoo and work it into a foamy lather on his coat. Start from the head but try not to get shampoo in his eyes, make sure you give his entire coat a thorough soaping. Your dog will particularly enjoy this if you massage his skin at the same time. Next, rinse your dog thoroughly and don't forget his belly! It's really important that you rinse off all the shampoo, any left on the coat will cause dry skin and itching. Keep rinsing until the water runs clear. may need to change the water at this point or use a shower to remove all the shampoo. A fairly powerful shower over the bath is a good way of getting rid of all the shampoo and should provide an enjoyable skin massage for your dog. Now dry him thoroughly with a towel. It helps if he has a good shake before you take him out of the bath. Most dogs like to have a mad race around after a bath – again, if you want this to be a pleasant experience, let him do this – you might want to spread a few towels out before hand though!

Some dogs require drying with a hair dryer – this is a good idea if your dog is elderly or the weather is cold. Ensure that the hair dryer is not too hot and that you don't hold it too close to your dog's hair as it can easily burn his skin. Now is the time for one more going over his coat with a brush or comb to remove any more hair that has been loosened by the bath. Ensure that he has a warm, dry and insulated place or bed to lie down on – a dog with a damp coat left in the cold will be very uncomfortable and this can bring on or worsen conditions such as arthritis. All dogs should have their ears checked and cleaned regularly and caring for your pet's ears should form a regular part of your grooming routine. You may wish to clean his ears with a warm, damp face cloth or some cotton wool after the bath – when cleaning, be careful not to probe too far into the ear.

Keep a look out for redness, soreness, scratching and head shaking. When inspecting your dog's ears, the skin should be a light pink colour. Dogs with droop ears are susceptible to ear infections and they should have their ears checked weekly. Infected ears can be extremely uncomfortable and painful for a dog and can lead to hearing loss. Ear infections sometimes lead to a haematoma – this happens when a dog shakes his head in response to the discomfort and the persistent head shaking ruptures a blood vessel. Remember to also examine your dog's paws as a part of the grooming process. Look out for grass seeds, cuts, sores and fungus infections. If your dog's nails require clipping, this is a job best left to the experts

(Veterinarian or Professional Groomer), as it is very easy to cut too much nail off and cutting the quick is extremely painful. Accidentally causing your dog pain, will mean that he won't enjoy the grooming experience and will try to avoid it next time which will make your task even more difficult. After a bath is a good time to treat your dog for fleas. The most effective products are only available through your veterinarian as they are prescription drugs. These products can be administered at home and involve placing a few drops on the scruff of your dogs neck. It is a good idea to treat your house for fleas at the same time and your vet should be able to advise you on products. A meal or some treats are a good way to finish up the grooming process – and this should ensure that your dog views grooming as a positive experience.