

Grooming tips for dogs

Just as humans require good grooming habits, so do our dogs. Besides being a healthy habit for our dogs, grooming is an important part of the relationship we have with them. Regular grooming sessions are beneficial because they:

- allow you and your dog to have quiet time together.
- promote your dog's good health in terms of his coat, skin, feet, ears, teeth, etc.
- allow you to become very familiar with all parts of your dog's body and you'll notice early on anything unusual that may require veterinary attention.
- promote good health for both humans and puppies – this type of interaction can actually lower stress levels and reduce blood pressure for both you and puppy.

When you and your puppy are learning how to groom, come armed with a great attitude, lots of patience, and in the beginning, lots of treats. Always start slowly and add more as your puppy accepts what you're doing. If you start getting frustrated, stop and come back to it later. Remember to keep it positive and fun.

Consulting a professional groomer is important for owners of dogs needing to be clipped or trimmed on a regular basis.

Bathing

How often?

Unless your dog has gotten into something smelly or dirty, she will need to be bathed only every two to four months. Bathing her too frequently will dry out her skin and strip the natural oils from her coat.

How to get started?

Make sure to use a shampoo that's made for dogs. Human shampoo can be too harsh for your puppy's skin and coat. Put a non-slip surface, such as a bath mat or towel, in the bottom of your tub (or sink, kiddie pool, or wherever you are doing your bathing). Lather up the coat, and then rinse thoroughly. Be sure to rinse completely or the shampoo will leave a dull residue on puppy's fur. Avoid getting shampoo and water directly in the eyes, mouth and inside the ears.

Brushing

Regular brushing is great, regardless of the length of your dog's coat, because it removes dead hair, distributes the natural oils for a clean and healthy coat, stimulates the surface of the skin, sloughs off dead and dry skin, and helps you become very familiar with your dog's body.

How often?

You should brush your dog every couple of days no matter what the length of the coat. Sometimes your brushing can have a specific purpose, such as removing hair mats or helping them shed their seasonal coat, but most often you'll just be doing a general purpose brushing or combing.

How to get started?

There are many types of brushes and combs available. Some are general purpose and others have specific uses. Examples of general-purpose tools include combs, pin-head brushes and the "Zoom Groom". Shedding blades and universal slicker brushes are great for helping remove dead coat and hair mats, but can be too harsh for general purpose brushing. Finishing slicker brushes are great for making fringe hair look fluffy, but may not have long or sturdy enough bristles to do much good for general purpose brushing. When shopping for tools, consider what you want to accomplish and choose

your tools accordingly.

Many puppies will want to chew on the brush or won't like being brushed in the beginning. Let them see and smell the brush, then begin brushing while you reward them with treats and praise. In the beginning, keep your sessions short and increase the length of time as your puppy learns to enjoy it. Remember to keep it positive and fun for both of you!

Feet

Keeping your dog's feet trimmed up nice and neat is beneficial, not only because it looks nice, but because it will help reduce the amount of tar, stickers, rocks, iceballs, salt, etc. that will get caught in the feet, all of which can be uncomfortable for your dog.

How to get started

Use a scissors to trim over the top of your dog's foot and even with the pads on the bottom of the foot. Do not try to trim in between the toes or the pads of the foot.

Nails

Since dog's nails grow in a curve, allowing them to get too long will cause the "fingers" and "toes" to splay or twist when the dog walks. This can be very uncomfortable and can ultimately lead to broken fingers and toes. Regular nail clipping can prevent this, as well as reduce the risk of torn nails. It can also save on wear and tear of your floors and carpeting.

How often

Nails should be checked and clipped approximately every two weeks. They are probably too long if you can hear them "click" as your dog walks across the floor.

How to get started

There are two styles of nail clippers made just for pets. Either style is acceptable as long as you are comfortable with how it feels in your hands, you have a clear line of sight to exactly where the blade is cutting, and the clipper has a sharp blade on it. Keep a jar of styptic powder handy to stop the bleeding in case you accidentally clip the vein.

Where to clip

If your puppy has white nails, you can see the pink vein through the nail. Clip off the tip of the nail, but not so much as to clip the vein. If your puppy has black nails, you will need to clip off a little at a time, looking at the nail tip straight on after each clip. When you start seeing a pale oval in the tip, it means you are near the vein and should stop clipping. If you keep the nails clipped on a regular basis, you will notice a hook at the end of a thicker part of the nail. The hook portion is what can be clipped off. Don't forget to clip the dew claws if your dog has them!

Remember to start slow

In the beginning, let your puppy sniff the clipper, hear the sound it makes, and feel it against the paw and nail before you start clipping. If you get just one nail done, that's a success! When you're just starting out, it may take a week or longer to do all four paws. Keep the sessions positive and reward your puppy with lots of treats and praise while you're clipping.

Ears

Keeping the inside surfaces of your dog's ears clean will not only feel good to your dog, but is good way to help prevent ear infections. Examining the outside surface will also alert you to the presence of wood ticks, fleas, or anything else unusual.

How often

Clean your dog's ears about once a week.

How to get started

You can use either a cotton ball or a piece of gauze with ear cleaning solution, or you can use a baby wipe wrapped around your finger. Don't use water because it doesn't evaporate very easily. Wipe the inside surface of your dog's ear, going down only as far as your finger easily fits. Don't use Q-tips or try to put anything further down the ear canal or you will risk causing a painful ear injury.

If you notice an unusual smell or a discharge coming from your dog's ears, bring it to your veterinarian's attention.

Teeth

Dogs can suffer from many of the same dental problems as humans (i.e., cavities, gum disease, tartar buildup, etc.) Bacteria from gum disease can also get in your dog's bloodstream causing other health problems. Regular teeth cleaning will save you vet expenses and eliminate the stress of having your dog anesthetized for the cleaning procedures.

How often

Clean your dog's teeth one to two times per week.

How to get started

You can use either a piece of gauze wrapped around your finger, a finger cap scrubber made for pet teeth cleaning, or a toothbrush designed for dogs. Do not use human toothpaste because it foams too much and can upset your dog's stomach. Use either toothpaste formulated for dogs, baking soda, or just water. You only need to clean the outside surface of the teeth. Your dog's tongue will keep the top and inside surfaces clean.

In the beginning you may need to start by just getting the puppy used to your rubbing her gums with your finger, and then moving on to one of the tools.

Here's to good health, fun and enjoyment of this time together with your dog!

