Bathe and Brush Pets the Right Way

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Though you may think there is nothing to learn about bathing and brushing your pet, following the simple procedures below will greatly improve your results and make this job easier on you and your pet.

Brushing

Before you bathe, you need to brush. A thorough brushing beforehand removes loose hair and significantly improves the effectiveness of the shampoo in cleaning down to the skin. And it makes bathing much less of a 'hairy' job.

Different coats sometimes require different brushes; for suggestions see Brushes and Combs: How to Choose the Right One for Your Dog. Prior to brushing, you may want to consider spraying on a detangling grooming mist, which will condition the hair and make brushing easier.

Be systematic about brushing. Start at the head and work toward the tail. Use firm, but gentle strokes with an emphasis on gentle. Pulling or ripping through tangles and mats hurts your pet and quickly erodes trust. Brushing can and should be a pleasurable experience, so take your time.

For pets with thick coats, first brush against the grain starting at the skin and brushing outward. When the entire coat is brushed this way, start over and brush with the grain. For all other coats, brush with the grain. Use long strokes for long-haired pets, and short strokes for pets with short or wiry hair.

After brushing, you can use a comb to remove more of the loose hair. A hand-held vacuum also does a good job if your pet will tolerate the noise.

Bathing

If you use the proper shampoo, you can bathe your pet more than once a week and not damage the coat.

The first decision to make is where the bath will take place. Kitchen sinks or laundry utility tubs work well for small pets, while bathroom tubs or portable pet tubs are best for larger pets. Outside hoses, while convenient, are not a very good alternative since the water is so cold. Water should be lukewarm for the shampoo to work best and for your dog's comfort.

Apply an ophthalmic ointment to protect the eyes, and insert a cotton ball in the ears to prevent water from entering the canals. There are many shampoos to choose from depending on your pet's hair coat, skin condition, or desired result. DO NOT use shampoos made for humans. They contain harsher detergents, are not pH balanced for pets, and could damage hair or sensitive skin.

Thoroughly soak your pet with water and apply the shampoo. Again, be systematic, working from neck to tail, and massage the shampoo into the hair and down to the skin. Use a cloth saturated with water and shampoo to wash the face, being careful not to get shampoo in the eyes.

Rinse completely, paying particular attention to the groin area, armpits, and between toes. Apply a second application of shampoo if necessary and rinse again. For a soft, manageable, and shiny coat, use a conditioner next, or mix the conditioner with your rinse water.

Drying Off

Squeeze excess water from coat. Then, for short-haired pets, use a cotton - or better yet, an absorbent chamois-type towel, to rub the hair vigorously first with the grain, then against, working from head to tail.

Long-haired pets, especially, should be combed out to prevent tangles from occurring while the animal is drying.

Keep pets warm and away from drafts while the hair dries, and do not let your pet outside until hair is completely dry. A damp coat is a magnet for dirt.

For a full, fluffed appearance, blow dry longer-haired dogs (with warm air, never hot) while brushing hair against the grain. Direct air flow at the undercoat and work out to the end of the hair. To remove fluffed appearance, finish by brushing hair with the grain.

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