

The Dog Odor Answer

Tackle that doggie smell with regular bathing and specially designed household products.

Maryann Mott

Love your dog but hate how he smells?

Don't worry, you're not alone. Doggie odor is a frequent complaint veterinarians and groomers hear from clients.

The good news is that in most cases a twofold solution – giving your dog regular baths and cleaning your home weekly – will solve the problem.

How can my sweet dog smell so bad?

Doggie odor happens when bacteria and yeast normally found on the skin start to break down surface oils. The oxidation of fat creates the foul smell.

It's the same thing that causes body odor in humans, says Lowell Ackerman, DVM, American College of Veterinary Dermatology diplomate, and clinical assistant professor at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton, Mass. If we didn't wash regularly, we'd be a lot more smelly than we are, and the same is true in animals.

While not all dogs have a strong odor, some definitely smell worse than others, such as Labrador Retrievers, Basset Hounds, and Cocker Spaniels, because of heavier sebaceous gland secretion. Breeds that produce less oil include Doberman Pinschers and Poodles.

Regardless of breed, bathe your dog whenever he stinks. As long as you use a proper shampoo and rinse thoroughly, don't worry about drying out his coat. Today's canine shampoos are gentler than ever before, allowing you to lather him up as often as necessary. For some dogs that means once a week; others, once a month.

Finding the right shampoo isn't difficult. Wendy Booth, a certified master groomer in Colorado Springs, Colo., recommends buying a formula specifically for dogs from a pet-supply store.

They have gobs of choices, and every last one of them should clean well, as long as the owner rinses well, she says, adding that residue left behind can cause skin and coat problems.

Other Things That Raise a Stink

If your dog still smells after his bath, an infection somewhere on his body might be the cause. Use your nose to sniff out where the foul smell is coming from. Here are a few places to check:

Mouth: Heavy tarter buildup on teeth can produce a strong odor. Make an appointment with your veterinarian for a dental cleaning; he or she will check for diseased gums and teeth, which can also cause bad breath.