

Equipped for Success

Having the right tools for the job means less time on the table, and a finer finish.

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The promise of technology is that it will make our lives easier, in this increasingly high-tech world. From computers to shampoo, we face a stunning array of choices. The flip side of all that modern convenience is information overload. When it comes to dogs, whether you're a novice preparing your first prospect for the ring, or a 30-year veteran with state of the art equipment purchased at your first dog show in 1974, there's hope.

Suesan E. Watson, a respected groomer for more than 30 years, and recipient of the 2003 Wahl Clipper Corporation Groomer of the Year Award, offers this professionally guided, non-technical tour of what you need, and what you need to know, to set up for success in the brave new world of dog grooming.

Brushes and Combs If you're going to be stranded on a desert island with only one tool, pack your brush. Both simple and essential, choose it with care. Even short-coated dogs like Dalmatians do a certain amount of continuous shedding. A good brush feels comfortable in your hand, and leaves a minimum of loose hair after a 20-minute brush-out. Pay attention to the number of bristles: more is better, for pulling hair. If you're noticing as much hair around the dog as on him, chances are you have the wrong brush.

Wood and plastic are the most common materials. Some professionals prefer the feel of wood, saying it transmits into your hand how hard you're brushing the dog. With plastic, you need to pay attention that you don't brush too hard. Most breeds will require a wire slicker brush; for long-coated dogs like a Shih Tzu or Poodle in show coat, a pin brush is often preferred.

A boar's bristle brush pulls oils up on short-coated dogs, for shine. It's not a must-have, and most people wouldn't notice the difference right off; but when you see a bristle-brushed dog in the sunlight, the results can be surprising. For some fanciers, it's a subtlety they eventually notice, and want to do all the time.

While combs come in all shapes, sizes, and finishes, any solid metal dog comb, narrow at one end and wider-toothed at the other, will work for most breeds.

Scissors Scissors suffer the most abuse. They get knocked off the table, dropped on the floor, are the most-used and least maintained tool. Buy a top-shelf pair (and learn to maintain them properly!). Higher quality steel is lighter in weight, and will scissor better, resulting in a finer finish that lasts longer. Save yourself the headache and the heartache, spend the \$7 to \$15, and send them out for professional sharpening on a regular basis. The less metal you grind off, the better they'll cut, and the longer they're going to last. More expensive shears cost more to sharpen, as they're done on a diamond wheel they'll get a better edge, which also means they'll be sharper.