

Puppy Grooming Takes Preparation, Patience and Practice

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Some dogs require hours of primping and preening whereas others need only a quick fix. But no matter the breed, size or coat type, your new pup requires basic grooming — brushing, bathing, nail trimming and ear care — to maintain its good looks and health.

Brushing: Your No. 1 chore as a puppy parent. Brushing removes hair, eliminates tangles, distributes skin oil and offers a productive way to spend time with your puppy. Frequency depends on the dog's coat. Ask the breeder or a groomer how often your puppy should be brushed if a brush or comb is best.

Methodical brushing assures you don't miss areas. Use quick, deep brush strokes on one small section at a time. Begin with the head and ears, then the chest and front legs. Next, brush the back, sides and tummy, then hindquarters. Finish with the tail. Don't brush too hard or rake the brush over puppy's skin. This is extremely irritating and painful. Brush down to the skin without contacting the skin itself.

Bathing: Periodic bathing keeps pups clean and sweet-smelling, and combats fleas. Generally, a bath every two to three months is acceptable, depending on the coat.

First brush the coat, trim the nails, clean the ears, then bathe. Bathing an unbrushed coat tightens the tangles. It's also important to have bath gear next to the tub beforehand; don't place your puppy in the tub then rush around looking for supplies. You'll need: puppy shampoo, towels, cotton balls, plastic bucket and sponge.

Secure your puppy in the tub (groomers use a "grooming noose" but a non-leather collar and leash will suffice). Place cotton balls in the ears to keep them dry. If your veterinarian recommends it, put a drop of mineral oil or eye ointment into puppy's eyes to prevent irritation. Saturate the puppy (a spray attachment is best) with warm water, beginning with the head, working back the same way you brush. Apply shampoo, diluted in the plastic bucket, with the sponge. Scrub the puppy thoroughly, then rinse. Shampoo again and rinse carefully to ensure no residual soap irritates the skin. Squeeze out excess water, then towel dry.

Because puppies can chill easily, it's best to dry them right away with a blow-dryer set on low.