

Bathing Your Puppy

Follow our guide to bathing your puppy.

Virginia Parker Guidry

To keep your puppy smelling sweet, periodic bathing is necessary. Deciding how often to bathe your pup depends on several factors: how dirty the puppy is, the type of coat, your own preferences, and whether fleas and ticks are present. Some owners bathe their pups once a month; some every eight weeks; some every two weeks.

The average for dogs groomed by professional groomers is about every six to eight weeks. Bathing your puppy isn't difficult, but it goes more smoothly if you're prepared. Many owners scrub their pets in the bathtub. Small pups can be bathed in the kitchen sink. A spray attachment works best, but skip the sink or tub full of soapy water. It's hard to completely rinse a dog that is standing in soapy water, and pups unaccustomed to bathing may be upset by deep water.

Many spray attachments are made especially for bathing dogs at home. Check out a local pet-supply store or pet-supply catalog. If you don't have a spray attachment, a large plastic cup or small plastic bowl will do. Do not bathe your puppy in the front yard with the garden hose; it's too cold. You'll need a non-slip rubber mat in the sink or tub so your puppy doesn't slide around, and if possible, a way to secure the youngster in the tub. Try using a professional grooming noose, which slips over one leg and the dog's neck. You can also use a leather-collar and leash by tying the attached leash to a fixed object near the bathtub or sink. Caution: Never leave your pup alone in a tub or sink — not even for a second! Have all your supplies handy before turning on the water.

You'll need cotton balls to put in the pup's ears, shampoo, and a washcloth or sponge. Make sure you use a shampoo specially formulated for dogs. Puppy shampoo formulas are also available. Conditioner is especially good for longhaired breeds; it reduces tangling when drying and moisturizes the coat.

Secure your puppy in the tub and place a cotton ball in each ear to keep water out. Wet the puppy with warm water beginning at the top of the head, behind the ears, avoiding the eyes and face. Keep the spray nozzle close to the puppy's body. Work back, soaking the back and the tail. Come back to the front and soak the puppy's neck and chest. Then saturate the tummy and legs. Finally, hold the nozzle on the top of the puppy's head and carefully dampen his face. Use the sponge if necessary. Don't spray water directly into the pup's face.

Once the puppy is completely wet, apply shampoo and begin scrubbing in a circular motion. Be careful not to get soap in the puppy's eyes, but don't skimp on shampoo. You want to get your puppy clean. Rinse well, beginning with the head and working back, and shampoo again. It usually takes two shampoos, sometimes three, to get a dog really clean. Dogs don't bathe daily like us; you could be scrubbing out weeks of grunge, especially if your puppy has been out in the rain or swimming in a creek. Pay attention to any bumps, lumps, sore spots or irritations as you bathe. If you notice anything unusual, consult your veterinarian.

The final rinse is especially important. If you don't get all the soap out of the coat, it can leave the coat dull, the pup's skin itchy, and in dark-colored pups, dried shampoo looks like flakes of dandruff. Rinse until you hear the coat squeak.

Add a conditioner after shampooing if desired. Some people find that conditioners make the coat harder to dry and oily when it's dry, but others use conditioners all the time. Try both ways and see which suits you.

Squeeze out excess water with your hands, then towel dry. If your pup has long hair, avoid vigorous rubbing, which tangles the coat. Use as many towels as needed to remove excess moisture. To prevent your puppy from becoming chilled, use an electric hair dryer set on low. Test the heat against the inside of your wrist. If it's too hot for your skin, it's definitely too hot for delicate puppy skin. Brush the coat while using the hair dryer until it's completely dry.

Next Step: Pearly Whites