

Grooming the American Bulldog

Less is more with this wash-and-go dog.

Steve Carney

Because American Bulldogs were bred to work on farms to guard against intruders, hunt vermin, and chase wayward cattle and hogs, it's no surprise they don't require a fussy or fancy grooming regimen.

"They're pretty low-maintenance," says Tonia Lorensen, president of the United States Traditional American Bulldog Club. They're a wash-and-go kind of dog.

But there are still a few basics to remember for optimal health and grooming. The one thing you do have to keep in mind is their ears. "They have to get cleaned out a lot, or they can get a yeast infection," Lorensen says.

Another area to watch: the mouth. Food can get trapped in the pockets of the mouths of dogs with pendulous lips or tight faces; this can lead to tartar and tooth decay. To avoid that, Lorensen suggests brushing the teeth often — every couple of weeks, or even daily if food collection seems to be a problem.

The breed sheds its short, coarse hair year-round, so Robert Latsha, owner of the United Kennel Club's top American Bulldog the past two years, King Haven's Brickhouse, uses a curry comb to remove the loose hair. Others say a few quick swipes with a rubber grooming glove once or twice a week suffice.

Like many white-coated, short-haired dogs, American Bulldogs have sensitive skin, often susceptible to allergies. Lorensen suggests bathing them only once every two months — as long as they haven't found a mud puddle to roll in. Latsha's dogs sleep on wood shavings to keep them from getting dirty; he only bathes them before a show or if they got really filthy during a hunting trip, for instance.

Samantha Jones, East Coast coordinator of the National American Bulldog Rescue Alliance, says she uses baby shampoo on her dogs because of its gentleness; she knows other owners who use mild human shampoos, such as oatmeal-based formulas, so as not to irritate their Bulldogs' sensitive skin.