

Grooming Dogs in Cold Weather

Colder temperatures mean dog owners should change their grooming routine during winter months.

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Winter's chill still has its hold on most of the country, bringing with it special grooming concerns for dog owners. For example, should you bathe your dog when temperatures are low? How can you handle those muddy paws? Here are answers to those questions and a few more.

Is it safe to bathe my dog in winter?

Yes, it's all right to bathe your dog in the wintertime. In fact, dogs sometimes need more grooming then. Longer, fluffier coats tend to mat, and walks through mud and snow are messy. If your dog is indoors to keep warm, you may be especially eager to bathe him to keep "doggie" odor to a minimum.

The dog must be completely dry before going outside, because a wet dog is more likely to become chilled. This is especially true of small breeds or those with short hair. Prolonged exposure to cold results in a drop in body temperature, or hypothermia, and it is most likely to occur when a dog is wet.

Avoid problems by giving the bath, say, after breakfast and the morning nature break. Bathe as usual, towel dry thoroughly, and keep the dog inside until completely dry. If you normally allow your dog to air dry, consider blow drying to speed the process.

Between baths, or if bathing with water is inconvenient, try dry cleaning. Sprinkle dry shampoo, available at pet supply stores, or a little cornstarch in the dog's coat and brush it through. Be sure to brush out the excess powder.

Should I avoid trimming my dog's coat?

Some owners believe giving a dog a haircut — even breeds requiring regular trimming, such as the Poodle, West Highland White Terrier or Schnauzer — during cold weather compromises the dog because it needs its coat to keep warm. While dogs need to keep warm, it's also true most pets don't live outdoors all the time; they're usually snuggled up with an owner in a centrally heated house. House dogs don't need to rely on long fur and a thick undercoat for warmth as wild animals or sled dogs do.

It is all right to give your dog a haircut in winter. If you're concerned about your dog's being cold on outings, consider a longer trim or a doggie sweater.

How often should I brush?

For untrimmed dogs, an extra-thick winter coat needs regular, perhaps daily brushing. Some dogs look their best in winter because the coat is so thick and luxurious, but it can mean more work for owners. Keep your dog's coat in top condition by brushing daily to remove tangles, dirt and dead hair, and to increase skin circulation and distribute oil.