

Beagle Grooming Basics

How to get on an effective grooming routine with a Beagle and the tools you'll need.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I just got a 9-week-old Beagle puppy and she will be kept indoors, but I have read so many different things on them. I need to know how often it will be safe to bathe her, what kind of shampoo will be good to use on her, and if it's safe to brush her daily or if I should do it every other day.

A. The beloved Beagle is truly an all-around dog — loyal, happy, easy to care for, and unquestionably cute. Just think of Charles Schulz's Snoopy, the most prominent Beagle of all until last year when 3-year-old Uno became the first Beagle in history to win the coveted Best in Show title at the Westminster Kennel Club. Baying up a storm, he was a fan favorite, drawing a standing ovation from the crowd.

You state that yours will be an indoor dog, but I hope you will give her lots of opportunities to romp and play outdoors because the Beagle was bred to be a hunting dog, sometimes referred to as "a nose with a dog attached." She is definitely not a couch potato and will get into mischief if she doesn't get enough exercise. The Beagle's double coat is of medium length, dense, and weather-resistant to the point of being waterproof. In its hunting pursuits, that hard outercoat serves as body armor as it rambles through brambles and brush in pursuit of quarry, while its soft undercoat offers insulation against the cold.

Despite her smooth appearance, your Beagle sheds. It will be more abundant in the spring when she drops her thicker winter coat, but she'll turn into a fuzz machine again in the fall when she blows coat to prepare for new winter growth. Unless she is in such a seasonal full-shedding mode, you will only need to brush her once a week. A bristle brush, rubber curry, or hound glove with raised rubber nodes work best, but a tool called the Furminator also removes shed hair and soft undercoat without harming her hard outercoat in the process. Whichever tool you use, massage your Beagle from head to tail with a vigorous stroke in the direction the hair grows. In warm weather, do it outdoors so the wind can whisk the hair away. Indoor cleanup is easier if you stand your Beagle on a large towel or a sheet.

As far as her bathing schedule goes, she will only need a bath when she gets dirty or smells funky. Beagles do have a penchant for getting smelly when they are out sniffing their way around the world. If there is rotting vegetation, goose poop, or a wild animal carcass, they will find it and investigate it thoroughly. If they are less adventurous, a bath every couple of months should suffice.

Because of her small size, you may give her a bath in the sink or the tub, soaking her all the way to the skin with a hose attachment as you gently feed water into the coat and lather her body with a gentle massaging technique. Unless she has fleas or dry skin, a tearless puppy shampoo will work just fine, but finish up with a conditioning rinse to make her coat lay flat and smell great. If she does require a medicated bath or flea shampoo, you would need to let the lather stay on for 15 minutes before thoroughly rinsing. No matter which shampoo you use, properly rinsing is vital in removing any soap residue from the coat; otherwise you could end up with an itchy pup.

The Beagle is an easy dog to care for, so you can perform all her grooming needs if you also learn to trim her nails and clean her ears. Use either the pliers-type nail clippers or one of the new battery-powered rotary pet-nail trimmers for her pedicure. Doing it on a monthly basis will keep overgrown nails from impeding her mobility or deforming her neat little paws.

Beagle ears hang down and prevent air from circulating inside so they are prone to waxy buildup and since they never met a puddle they didn't like, water in the ears can also lead to infection. Swab them out weekly with one of the many over-the-counter ear wash products for dogs. I like herbal products like one made by Solid Gold that contains Comfrey, an antifungal botanical with healing properties, or one called NaturVet Ear Wash that uses tea tree oil, a gentle natural cleanser that helps dissolve ear wax and remove debris. Avoid ear cleaners that contain alcohol or peroxide as they may sting her.