

Do-It-Yourself Grooming?

Letting your groomer properly prep your dog before a bath will ensure complete grooming.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. Should owners bathe their own pets before taking them to a groomer? Do groomers offer discounts if owners bathe their dogs first?

A. No, we usually tell owners not to bathe their pets themselves before bringing them in for grooming. Of course there are exceptions; when dogs come in for brushing alone, we would charge less than we do for a "B & B," (bath and brush-out).

There are many reasons we discourage home baths prior to grooming. First, most owners do not brush and comb dogs with medium, long or curly coats adequately to prepare them for the tub. This means any mats or snarls in their coats will be set in more tightly because wetting them only makes matters worse. Double-coated dogs like Golden Retrievers or German Shepherds need their fluffy undercoat thoroughly brushed out prior to the bath so shampoo can penetrate all the way to the skin.

Most groomers don't simply pop the pup into the tub. In addition to removing dead and shed hair from the coat, they do prep work first that usually includes ear cleaning, nail cutting and trimming. Proper prep work and a good bath are the foundations of quality grooming.

Once in the tub, we secure the dog so it cannot jump out, and then feed warm water into the coat from the neck down. Once the body is soaked, we gently wet the face, then massage the lather all over, taking care not to get water or suds into eyes, nose, mouth or ears. Many dogs need to be shampooed twice to get squeaky-clean. Rinsing must also be very thorough. Any soapy residue left in the coat will cause dryness and make a proper finish impossible. In most cases we use a high-velocity force dryer to blow moisture from the coat as part of the drying process.

Today we are seeing many do-it-yourself dog washes where owners can bring their pet in and wash him in waist-high tubs, with the basics such as shampoo, towels, brushes and aprons provided. Nail-trimming is usually offered for an additional charge as are specialized shampoos and conditioners. Some offer the use of clippers as well. They are catching on fast and they do charge less than a regular grooming salon but the more knowledgeable the owner is about the basics of dog bathing, the better the results will be.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a Certified Master Groomer and writer who has been grooming pets since 1976. With her daughter Missi, she owns The Village Groomer in Walpole, Mass. She has also written extensively on pet care for several consumer magazines and authored three books on dogs and careers with pets. Kathy lives with her pets on Cape Cod.

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