

How to Bathe a Dog

A photo slide show walks you through the steps to get your dirty dog clean.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Sooner or later, every dog needs a bath. Even if he is a regular at the local grooming salon, there will come a day when he will roll in something smelly or take a side trip through the swamp. Here are some pointers to make your job easier.

Photographs by Gina Cioli/BowTie Inc.

1. Assemble your supplies. For medium- to longhaired dogs, you'll need a curved-bristle slicker brush and stainless-steel comb, and a rubber curry brush for short and smooth coats. You'll also need cotton balls or soft tissues, ear cleaner, towels, pet shampoo, conditioner, a rubber mat for the bottom of the tub or sink to keep her from sliding, and a hair dryer. Your own will do, but professional table dryers are less noisy and will free up both of your hands when you dry your dog.

2. Brush your dog from head to tail to remove tangles and shed hair. For full-coated breeds, line brushing works best, patting and pulling the hair one small area at a time. The rubber curry whisks shed hair and dirt from shorties and smoothies. Check your brush work with your comb. Mats and tangles get worse when wet, sometimes becoming impossible to brush out.

3. Use a cotton ball or tissue moistened with ear cleaner to swab out the ear canal, gently massaging it as you work. Some ear wax is normal, but any swelling, foul odor, or discharge indicates an ear infection and calls for a trip to the vet.

4. Place your dog in the tub or sink, and feed water directly into the coat, working from the back of the neck down toward the tail and saturating all the way to the skin. Wet the face with a gentle spray, taking care not to get water in the eyes, ears, or mouth.

5. Lather thoroughly, using your fingers to massage and penetrate the coat. Don't neglect faces, feet, and fannies – areas that can get soiled and smelly. You may need to shampoo twice to get a dirty dog clean.

Use the right shampoo. Tearless hypoallergenic shampoos work well on all pets, but special products are available for combating odors, making white coats sparkle, relieving itch and dandruff from dry, flaky coats, banishing fleas, and keeping terrier coats wiry.

6. Rinse until the water runs clear and your dog feels squeaky-clean. Cover his eyes with one hand while rinsing his face.

7. Apply a crème rinse or conditioner to cut down on static, add body, and make the coat more manageable. Rinse again until water runs clear.

8. Squeeze excess water from the coat, then towel dry thoroughly. Smooth-coated dogs may be air-dried, but most others need a blow dryer to complete the process. Direct the air flow on the area being brushed. Human hair dryers tend to get hot, so don't leave it on one spot too long.

9. Keep your dog indoors for a while. Freshly-bathed dogs love to roll around outdoors, undoing your tender loving care in the process! Offer a treat for good behavior so your dog will grow to love being bathed.

Kathy Salzberg, NCMG, is a regular contributor to DOG FANCY and DogChannel's Ask the Groomer expert.

For more on grooming your dog, check out the February 2009 issue of DOG FANCY.