

What to Look for in a Dog Groomer

Investigate and visit several dog groomers to determine which will be best for your pet.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Finding a dog groomer is not much different from choosing a preschool teacher. You want someone who is kind, knowledgeable, trustworthy, and easy to communicate with. But in the groomer's case, you also want someone who has the artistic skill to make your dog look awesome.

The pet-grooming profession does not require licensing, so you'll need to verify a groomer's credentials. Groomers work in a variety of places: salons, kennels, pet supply stores, veterinary clinics, mobile vans, and in home-based businesses.

If yours is a breed that requires expert styling – a Poodle, Bichon Frisé, or terrier – get a recommendation from your breeder. Word of mouth is a groomer's best advertisement, but before you make that first appointment, investigate some more. Visit several groomers to determine which is best for your pet.

It's a good idea to call ahead because skilled dog groomers are in demand and on a tight schedule. The prospective groomer should welcome your visit, answer your questions courteously, and assure you that if your dog has special needs he or she will do their best to accommodate them. If your dog is a puppy or senior, a good groomer will work to get him finished quickly. He or she will go over your dog's coat and discuss styling.

The groomer may have a portfolio or website available to see his or her work. The shop should look and smell clean, and you should be able to observe the staff caring for their canine clients in a kind and respectful way. For your pet's protection, a conscientious groomer will request you provide vaccination records.

Is the groomer certified? Three national organizations offer this credential: the National Dog Groomers Association of America, the International Society of Canine Cosmetologists, and the International Professional Groomers Inc. Certification is earned through a series of hands-on and written tests, and judged by accredited professionals.

Does the groomer participate in grooming competitions? These rigorous contests take place nationwide and dedicated groomers vie for trophies, cash prizes, and grooming equipment, and most important, respect and recognition from their peers.

Professional dog grooming is demanding work, but it's a labor of love for the vast majority of its practitioners. A groomer needs many skills: animal handling, brushing, de-matting, clipping, bathing, blow-drying, scissoring, and hand-stripping. He or she must be able to visualize the way a dog should look to execute the required trim.

If the groomer is unfamiliar with your dog's breed, he or she should have reference books to help properly style your dog in a show or pet trim, depending upon your preference. If yours is a mixed breed, the "standard" is a piece of cake: The groomer should make him look adorable!