

Doggie Day Spa

The latest trend for the pampered pooch.

Sally Deneen

"We're more on the gym side of being a spa," says Nichols, who doesn't supply aromatherapy, but provides massage on an as-needed basis. "We haven't gotten quite to the level of cucumbers on the eyes," she says, chuckling.

Although the luxuries available vary at doggie spa facilities, "You're definitely looking at a growing trend," says VanPamelen, who will open a second, larger New York Dog Spa and Hotel on the Upper East Side this year. And as spas spread to other big cities, more dogs will know what it means to lie in the lap of luxury. Aah, a dogs life indeed.

How to Choose a Doggie Spa

Look at factors such as: Cleanliness. Odor. Is there a strong smell of urine, or a fresh scent? The greeting your pet receives. Qualifications of the staff, including their experience and how they interact with the dogs. Pay attention to your first impressions. Also ask for client references.

Aromatherapy and Massage: Are They Worthwhile?

"Dogs really do seem to like the massage," says Nicholas Dodman, BVMS, a veterinary behaviorist at Tufts University's Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine in North Grafton, Mass. Petting, in general, is a tactile award. At home, Dodman recommends giving your dog a massage after a great training session. "They can actually get a faraway look. Its a relaxation and a reward," Dodman says. So, at a spa, your dog may like the same if he is comfortable with the attendants.

How about aromatherapy — do certain scents make dogs mellow? "Nothing is known," Dodman says. "There's just absolutely no evidence to support it at all. However, dogs may be attracted to certain fragrances. At Tufts, the behavior clinic sometimes advises pet owners to add a drop of vanilla or, even better, anisette to a chew toy. The scent revives interest in the toy because they particularly like that taste-smell combination.

So, maybe the scent of lavender doesn't do much for Lucy, but as Bob Vetere, president of the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association points out, "It certainly makes us more mellow while we're with them."

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