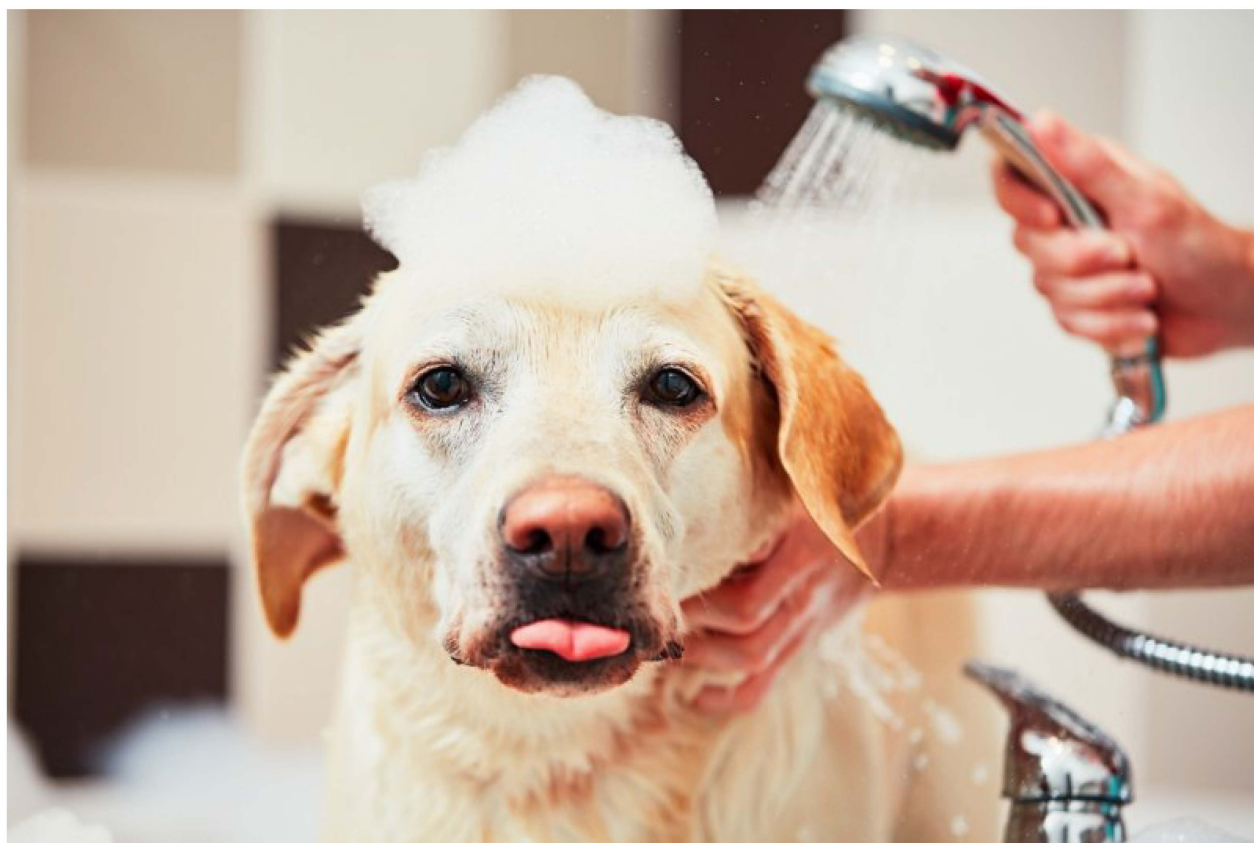


Dog Grooming Guide



Grooming your dog is about more than the occasional bath and brush – it’s a vital part of their physical and mental well-being. Working dogs especially need regular upkeep to help keep their coats, skin and nails in tip-top shape.

“There are numerous health benefits to grooming a dog, especially a working dog,” says Rachael L. Currao, DVM. “Matted fur can be very uncomfortable, and, in some cases, limit range of motion, depending on the location.”

Do-it-yourself **dog grooming** is easily accomplished at home. An established routine helps keep your hound healthy and builds a strong human-dog bond.

“Bonding time between the owner and dog is a very important part of grooming, as long as both the owner and dog enjoy the process,” adds Dr. Currao.

Why is it important to groom your dog

Dog grooming goes beyond adding extra swag in your dog’s wag – it’s also a significant factor in their health and happiness. Reasons to establish a grooming routine include:

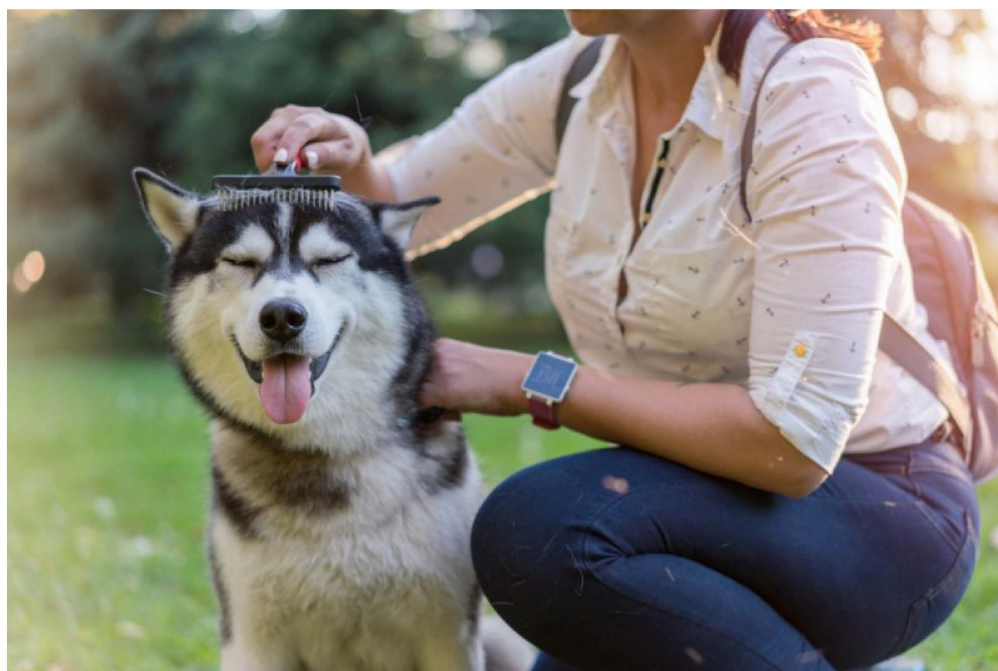
- Healthy coat and skin. Brushing revitalizes your canine’s coat and skin while removing dirt, pests or parasites stuck in their fur after a day of working in the field or on the farm.
- Regular check-ups. You can monitor for rashes, cuts and other health issues and get timely treatment for any medical problems or concerns.
- Building a bond. Dog grooming lets you show affection and strengthen your connection with your furry friend.
- Improved well-being. The “top dog” treatment leads to calm, relaxed and content canines.

How to get your dog used to grooming

Some dogs love grooming, while others don’t. These dog grooming tips can help make cautious dogs more comfortable.

- Start young. Exposing your pup early on helps get them used to the sights, sounds and sensations of grooming.
- Go slow. Start with short sessions and gradually build up to longer treatments.
- Offer rewards. Encourage good behavior and provide positive reinforcement with treats, toys and affection.
- Establish a routine. Dogs are creatures of habit. Set specific days and times for grooming and keep the duration of sessions to a similar length.

How to brush dog hair



Regular brushing is one of the best things you can do for your dog's hygiene and happiness. It gives you a chance to spend one-on-one time together, and it also benefits their health by:

- Removing dirt and old fur
- Preventing knots and mats
- Distributing naturally occurring oils over their skin and fur
- Enhancing blood circulation and removing dead, dry skin
- Providing a chance to scan for lumps, bumps and irritated skin
- Reducing the need for baths

Brushing frequency

Different dogs have different brushing requirements. After all, the needs of an active, working dog are different than the needs of a lap dog. No matter what kind of coat and lifestyle they have, brushing your dog a few times a week is good practice. If your pup has tangles, mats and a dull-looking coat, they need some TLC. You can't over-brush a dog, and many canines find it a soothing part of their routine.

Different kinds of dog brushes

The wrong brush can land you in the doghouse. To ensure effectiveness (and your dog's enjoyment), use a brush matched to your dog's fur type. Common **dog brushes** include:

- Slicker brushes. The fine wire bristles of a slicker brush make quick work of tangles, mats and knots. It's essential for any dog grooming kit.
- Pin brushes. Like human hairbrushes, pin brushes have flexible wires that are gentle on the skin and good for untangling minor knots. This type of brush is great for double-coated dogs and those with medium and long coats.
- Bristle brushes. The tightly packed bristles are excellent at removing loose fur and stimulating the skin of short-haired, smooth-coated and frequently shedding dogs.
- Rakes. A must-have for owners of double-coated dogs, rakes penetrate thick coats and remove tangles and dead fur from undercoats.
- De-matting rakes. These specialized tools have sharp blades and teeth that "work" through troublesome fur, stubborn knots and tangles without irritating sensitive skin.
- Grooming gloves. Owners of very short-haired dogs can often skip the brush and use a grooming glove to remove loose fur.

For the most effective brushing, work from top to tail and move in the direction of their coat and away from their skin. Use a light touch on sensitive areas, like the ears and belly. Your dog should find brushing pleasant and soothing; pay attention to their reaction and adjust accordingly.

Removing mats

Matted fur can pull at a dog's skin, causing pain and irritation. Preventing and removing mats is essential, especially in working dogs where debris can build up in their fur after a day outside or on the farm.

"Mud, dirt or other debris caked on their fur can traumatize the underlying skin and cause ulcers or wounds. The mat also doesn't allow air flow to the skin and can lead to moisture retention against the skin and wounds," says Dr. Currao.

Mats also give your dog less insulation in cold weather and can hide parasites, like fleas. Follow these tips to remove mats from your working dog's fur:

- Work small mats and tangles apart with your fingers.
- For larger or more stubborn knots, use a brush or metal comb.
- Use small strokes and take frequent breaks.
- Detangling spray can help loosen mats.
- Hold fur below the mat to reduce painful pulling on the skin.
- Always end the session with treats.

Mats occur close to the skin. It's very easy to accidentally cut your dog when using scissors to remove a knot, which can lead to stitches or an infection. Try dog clippers, or, for the toughest tangles, go to a professional groomer.

“Mats can be challenging and painful to remove, and many owners inadvertently cut their dogs skin when trying to remove them. The best treatment is to prevent mats with frequent brushing,” says Dr. Currao.

Bathing your dog



Baths help remove loose hair and dirt from your dog's coat, improve its shine and eliminate funky odors. How often you should bathe your dog depends on its breed and lifestyle. For example, breeds with water-repellent coats, like Golden Retrievers, or thick double-coated dogs, like Malamutes, require minimal bathing. Working dogs may require more tub time, depending on how much dirt and debris they pick up while in the field.

Remember, overbathing a dog can strip their skin and fur of essential natural oils. A good rule of thumb is to only give your dog a bath when they need one, like when they are visibly dirty, their coat has lost its luster or they smell bad.

Bath time tips

Most pooches don't mind a little funk and filth, so it can be a dogfight to get them into the tub. As with all aspects of dog grooming, make the experience positive by incorporating plenty of treats, toys and affection. Keep these additional tips in mind when bath time rolls around.

- Water that is too hot or cold creates a negative sensation – lukewarm water is best.
- Keep the shampoo, washcloth, towels and any other bathing equipment you need within arm's reach – once your dog is in the tub, it can be hard to break away.
- Avoid a handheld showerhead or anything with a harsh spray. Instead, let the water hit your hand first and work it into their coat, or use a bucket or cup to gently pour it over them.
- Start at the neck and work your way down, taking care to keep water out of your dog's ears, eyes and mouth. Use a damp washcloth to clean their face.
- Rinse well—soap residue can cause irritation.
- Don't forget to reward your good boy or girl at the end of bath time.

Use a dog-specific shampoo

A dog's skin only has three to five layers of skin cells (compared to our 10 to 15 layers), so you need a **dog-specific shampoo** that is right for their sensitive skin. Human shampoo, even those formulated for babies, strips their natural oils and disrupts the pH balance of their coats. "Wrong" shampoos can also lead to itchy skin and leave dogs vulnerable to parasites and illness.

There is no one-size-fits-all dog shampoo, but safe choices include mild shampoos made with natural ingredients and free from artificial colors and fragrances. Some dogs need stronger stuff, like medicated shampoos to treat fleas, ticks or specific skin problems.

Towel off

Don't forget to dry your dog off after bath time. A good toweling keeps a dripping wet dog from running around your house and helps prevent matting in dogs with long or thick coats.

It can be tempting to use a hairdryer to speed up the process, but it's easy to burn a dog's skin and many pups find the noise frightening. Instead, use a towel to press and squeeze their fur (don't rub) to remove excess water.

Dog haircuts

Some pups may never need a doggy hairstylist, while others require one as a regular part of their dog grooming routine. Basic dog hair cuts are a practical way to remove fur from around their eyes, mouth and rears. Some breeds – like Poodles and Portuguese Water Dogs – require more intensive trims.

Understanding your breed's needs is important, and a little research before you begin snipping or clipping goes a long way. For example, you might think shaving double-coated dogs will keep them cooler in the summer. It actually has the opposite effect—their fur already helps keeps them cool, and shaving it can lead to a variety of other health issues.

The **American Kennel Club** or **Continental Kennel Club** can offer insight into your dog's standard appearance, or you can work with a professional groomer to learn how to maintain your dog's coat at home.

Dog clippers vs. scissors vs. shears

The decision to use **clippers**, scissors or shears is determined by your dog's coat, the trimming that's needed and your level of confidence.

- Clippers are ideal for short-haired dogs and owners unsure of their abilities. Dog hair clippers have different blades and often include guides for trimming fur of various lengths and creating different looks. Long-haired pooches may require multiple blades/guides, while a single blade/guide is often enough for those with short coats.
 - Many canines find the noise of dog clippers distressing. Expose them to the sound at a young age or use the quietest pair possible.
- Scissors are often the best choice for cutting long coats. Two types of scissors are commonly used—straight scissors for basic trims and curved scissors for finer-finish cuts. Match the scissors to the length and thickness of your dog's coat. Use scissors with rounded tips for safety.
- Shears, also known as thinning scissors, either have a blade and a toothed-blade comb, or two tooth-blade combs. Thinning shears for dogs are useful for thick or mat-prone areas.

Grooming dog paws and pads

Keeping your dog's paws in good working order is more than a puppy pedicure—it's an integral part of a good dog grooming at-home routine. Paws protect your furry friend's joints and bones from shock and insulate against weather, and properly treated paws drag in less dirt and debris. To keep them in tip-top shape:

- Inspect them often for cuts or punctures and treat small wounds with an antibiotic ointment.
- Remove any debris, such as thorns, broken glass or pebbles.
- Check for dry or cracked pads and treat them with a dog-specific moisturizer or balm.

Furry feet attract everything, from the chemicals used on lawns, to burrs, to sidewalk salt. Trimming the fur between your pup's paw pads is a preventative step to help keep debris from getting stuck.

How to trim dog nails



Trimming dog toenails is a sensitive but essential task. Long toenails can be uncomfortable and increase the chance of your dog tearing one off or developing a more serious health condition. However, cutting them too short can cause pain and bleeding.

The regularity of trimming a dogs' toenails varies. For example, active working dogs may naturally wear down their nails, as will regular long walks on hard surfaces, like concrete and asphalt. Conversely, dogs who take shorter walks or primarily play on soft surfaces, like the dog park, will need more maintenance.

Dog nail grooming

Dog toenails are sensitive and consist of multiple parts: the outer nail, the inner nail and the "quick," a blood vessel and nerve running through the nail.

- The outer nail is the hard part that is cut.
- The inner nail is soft and should be left alone.
- Hitting the quick is painful and causes bleeding.

Because bleeding is a possibility, have styptic powder or cornstarch on hand. As you prepare to cut the nail, pay close attention to the quick (the part you want to avoid cutting)—it's noticeable as the pink part for a dog with white nails. Unfortunately, it's harder to discern for dogs with dark nails. When cutting, follow these tips:

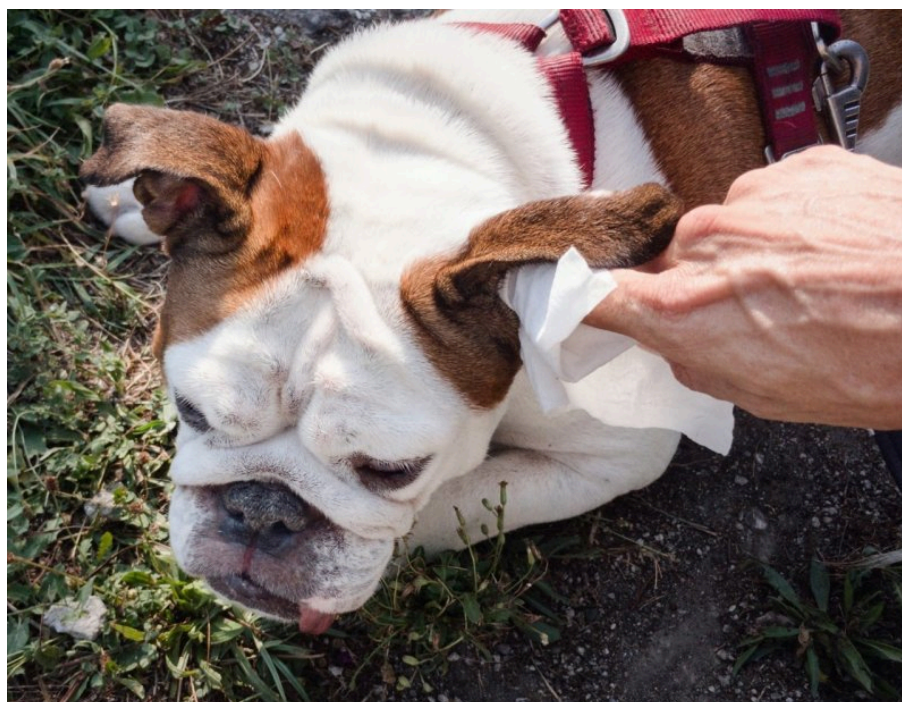
- Start slow and cut just a little bit of the nail at a time.
- Make cuts top to bottom at a slight angle (not side-to-side) to maintain the nail's natural curve.
- There is no rule that says you have to cut all of your dog's toenails at one time. If you or your dog feel stressed, try doing a nail a day.

Nail-clipping tools

The best **dog nail clippers** vary from animal to animal. The most common tools are:

- Scissor clippers work like scissors and are the favorite dog nail clippers of novices.
- Guillotine clippers require you to stick the nail in a hole and squeeze the blade and are a simple and popular tool for dog nail trimming.
- Dog nail grinders are a safe and gentle alternative to clipping. Some dogs may find the vibration upsetting, and the process takes longer than clipping.

Cleaning your dog's ears



Dog ears are a magnet for dirt, yeast, infections and parasites, which makes cleaning them a vital part of dog grooming. Some dogs—like those working in the dust and dirt of a farm or field—need their ears cleaned consistently, while others rarely need it at all. Overcleaning a canine’s ears removes healthy bacteria and increases the odds of infection, so simply knowing if cleaning is needed is as important as knowing how to clean dog ears.

A healthy dog ear is:

- Pink
- Odorless
- Clean
- Not inflamed

Signs of an ear that needs cleaning include:

- Noticeable dirt
- Red or inflamed skin
- Yeasty odor
- Persistent head shaking, even if their ears are clean

The Best way to clean dog ears

It’s common to see advice on how to clean dog ears with hydrogen peroxide or how to clean dog ears with vinegar, but the best way to clean dog ears is with a solution specifically formulated for the task. Dog ears are sensitive, and homemade remedies can cause irritation or exacerbate an existing problem.

Cleaning your dog’s teeth



Regularly cleaning your canine's teeth prevents bad breath, dog dental disease, infections and tooth loss. Plus, regular dog dental care can help you steer clear of an expensive trip to the dentist.

"Numerous health issues can crop up with dental disease in dogs. Dental disease can cause infections and abscesses in the mouth. Aside from issues with eating and oral health, dental disease can affect the heart and other organs if severe and untreated," says Dr. Currao.

Try these methods to keep your dog's mouth in good shape.

- Brush their teeth. Tooth brushing is the foundation of a good dog dental cleaning routine. Every day is ideal, but if you can't hound your dog that often, aim for a few times a week. Use a dog-approved toothbrush and toothpaste.
- Dog toothbrushes have special handles and soft bristles that make the process easier and quicker.
- Dog toothpaste comes in Fido-friendly flavors, like peanut butter and beef, and avoids toxic-to-dog ingredients, like fluoride.
- Use dental chews. Chewing is a natural dog behavior that helps keep teeth and gums healthy. **Dental chews** use this instinct in your favor. They feature a variety of ridges, nubs, shapes and sizes designed to scrape tartar and plaque away.
- How often should you give your dog dental chews? Greenies dog dental chews suggest one a day helps keep the dentist away. Crunchy foods, like baby carrots and celery sticks, also scrape tartar and plaque and are a nice natural supplement to commercial dental chews.
- Offer dog dental toys. Dental toys are a big contributor to dog dental care at home. The grooves, ridges and nubs scrape tartar away from teeth and gums and encourage saliva production, which rinses away food debris and bacteria. Rotating dog dental sticks, dental bones and other tooth-friendly toys will keep your dog entertained and engaged.
- Try dog dental spray. A dental spray formulated for dogs is a good supplement to a dog dental care routine. Like mouthwash for humans, it helps prevent tartar and plaque buildup and makes their breath smell fresher. If applying dog dental spray directly into your furry friend's mouth is a struggle, try applying it to their favorite toy or bone.

Pet parenthood is a big responsibility, and dog grooming is an aspect that requires regular attention. Dog grooming at home can save you from expensive, time-consuming trips to the groomers, show your pup just how much you love them and make them look even more fetching.