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Proper Maintenance of Your Dog's Coat, Ears, Teeth and Nails

Everybody is looking to save money these days. Below are tips on how to groom your dog and properly maintain their coat, ears, and nails yourself.

Bathing -- I was spoiled in California when I could bathe my dogs outside 9-10 months a year. Here in Central Oregon, I am bathing them indoors 9-10 months a year. I have a big shower so the dogs just come right in the shower with me. If you don't have that luxury, there are groomers in town that provide you with a tub to bathe your own dog for a nominal fee. Most provide the shampoo and conditioner as well. It is best to use a shampoo that is designed specifically for dogs (available at local pet stores). These dog shampoos have the proper pH balance for your dog's coat. Another option is the human shampoo Pantene. I often use this, and my dog's coat comes out silky and squeaky clean for a fraction of the cost of the pet products. Whether using Pantene or a shampoo designed for pets, I always dilute it. It is much easier to rinse out, especially for dogs with heavy coats, and is less likely to leave a detergent residue on the coat. (It saves money too!) Do make sure you thoroughly rinse your dog to get all of the soap out of their coat. I always finish with a product called Show Sheen, a conditioner, that is put on right after a towel dry but before your dog is completely dry. You can get it under the name Mane and Tail at feed stores.

Brushing -- I have had many different hairstyles and lengths over the years and have used different types of hair brushes depending on my hair style. The same goes for your dogs, and you may have to experiment. Local groomers can provide expert advice on what types of brushes work best for your dog's coat. In general I have found that any soft bristle brush works well on short-haired dogs. For long-haired dogs, the pin brushes or slicker brushes work well. For dogs with undercoat, slicker brushes are vital to get through to the undercoat, and to help strip the dead undercoat. If you don't strip the undercoat it will get matted, especially during shedding season. If I want my dogs looking extra fine, I will finish by combing with a fine tooth comb. My Australian Shepherd has a very thick undercoat. I now send her to a professional groomer twice a year to blow out all of the undercoat during her shedding cycles. This makes home grooming so much easier during shedding season, and reduces the "tumbleweeds" in the house. Some of my clients rave about a new product called the Furminator which is a blade that strips the undercoat. My clients tell me that by using this product, they no longer use a groomer to blow the undercoat during shedding season.

Teeth -- if your dog can tolerate it, you should brush your dog's teeth daily. Professionally cleaning your dog's teeth can cost hundreds of dollars and involves some risk since they have to be put under general anesthesia. Your vet can provide you with

the proper brush and flavored toothpaste. There are also tartar control additives that can be added to your dog's water. Prescription and over the counter chews and dog treats can also help control tartar. If teeth are not cared for, it can affect your dog's liver, kidneys and heart. Signs to look for and that require a vet check are excessive browning or yellowing of teeth, red and inflamed gums, blood on chew toys, bones, or toothbrush, bad breath, having trouble chewing, or pawing at the mouth. While brushing, inspect for any cracked or chipped teeth.

Cleaning Ears -- Ear cleaning is easy and doesn't take long. Gently squeeze a few drops of ear cleaner, per instructions into the ear canal. Be careful not to go very deep. Massage the ears for about 15-20 seconds, or per instructions on the bottle, to loosen dirt and wax. Your dog may shake his head which is okay since it helps to loosen the debris. Use a cotton ball, gauze pads, or a soft cloth moistened with the liquid cleaner to wipe out the outside of the ear canal. Follow up by carefully drying the outside of the canal with a dry cotton ball, gauze pad or soft cloth. Dogs with long ears are more susceptible to bacteria, fungus and yeast growth. Also dogs with allergies seem to be more prone to ear infections. These dogs need to have their ears cleaned more often. If you see debris inside your dog's ear or your dog's ears smell bad, it is time to have them cleaned.

Trimming Nails -- Nail trimming can be stressful for the dog and dog owner. Many choose to send their dog to a groomer for this job. It is quite easy to do if you follow some simple instructions. If your dog is stressed, give them a treat after each nail is clipped, or have someone redirect them with a treat. A spoonful of peanut butter that your dog can lick while their nails are being clipped works wonders. Use a high quality clipper that cuts cleanly. If the nail is not cut cleanly it will hurt. I suggest replacing your clippers once a year. They do get dull over time. Use a clipper that has a stop so you only can cut about a ¼ inch at a time. This way you don't cut the quick which can be both painful to the dog, and a bloody mess. For dogs with white nails, the pink quick will be easy to see. For dogs with black nails it is a little more difficult, so cut no more than ¼ inch at a time. Before you see the quick, the tip of the nail will be whitish gray. This is where you want to stop or you will get the quick with the next clip. For my dog with black nails, I cut about a ¼-inch past where the nail starts to curl. If you do cut the quick, use a product called Kwik Stop found at all pet stores, or use corn starch or a styptic pencil that have ingredients that help clot the wound.

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