



# The Mayhew Animal Home Dog Grooming

## **How to groom your dog with success**

You're rushed off your feet, your kids take up all your time, and on top of that, your crazy, tangled, lovable shadow looks like no recognizable breed on earth! Finally, the guilt is too much, and it's time to set to work!

### **Brushing**

Brushing your dog out is the single most important task you have to do to keep your dog's coat in good shape. Your local groomer can help you, but keeping a dog's coat in tip-top condition is your job. Keep on top of it at all times. Make the most of the time you have with Max: he will have your total, one-on-one attention. Relax. He'll be in doggie heaven if you do it right and it will build a bond of trust and love between you and your best friend.

It's not enough just to brush the top coat. So many groomers hear 'Oh, he's got a couple of knots, but he's not too bad, he just needs a bit of a brush and a bath'. Smoothing his coat down may ease your conscience a bit, and keep up appearances, but it won't fool a groomer, and more importantly, it will do no good for your dog's skin. Prepare yourself for a good, lengthy session – there are no shortcuts. And you need the right tools: a good brush...a soft slicker brush is the best all purpose brush. I like to use a medium sized soft slicker, and a small slicker on the legs and the face for dogs with beards. You also need a comb to check through afterwards that there are no remaining knots – you can buy what are called 'Greyhound' combs, wider teeth at one end and narrower at the other, or 'detangling combs' where the teeth rotate. Some breeders do not believe in slicker brushes and feel they are too harsh, and will opt for a pin brush or a comb only, but dogs that are groomed with only these tools will often be those that leave a professional groomer with no choice but to clip the entire coat off. Learning to use your slicker appropriately is the key.

OK, you have the equipment, now you need to practise using it so you don't put your dog off for life! If you feel the bristles on the slicker brush, you will see they are pretty sharp. Try pulling the brush against your own bare skin. At what angle does it feel best? If you keep the brush flat, it will give you a pleasant, stimulating massage, a bit like a good back scratch! If you flip your wrist a bit and catch yourself with the end or side of the brush, you'll find it pretty sharp. It can make you jump. Now imagine that on a little guy with a fairly thin coat...painful! You'll not be popular next time you produce the brush. Good action from the whole arm, and not a flick of the wrist, and you should be OK. Some dogs will object a bit at first, but they will soon become accustomed to it. Tip: don't leave the brush bristle side up when you put it down...it's very painful to step on or to put your hand on, and will pierce the skin.

Brush a little at a time. When you brush, you need to brush every inch, and be able to see the skin underneath. If you find matts, try to pull them apart with your fingers a little, hold the matt if it is not too close to the skin, and brush it carefully. You'll be brushing over your fingers...you'll see what it feels like if your technique is wrong. You can also buy detangling sprays to spray on and leave for a few minutes before you brush...these can be

quite good, working something like a good conditioner. If your dog won't tolerate it for long, do only a section at a time, and come back to it another day or later that same day. Make it a pleasurable experience, with lots of encouragement and praise. Treats and breaks if necessary! If he bites the brush, be firm, tell him no, and continue. Finish when you decide, not him, but, most important, don't get mad at him...this is a chance for you to spend quality time together, to 'bond'....use it! Don't tug at any knots unless you are holding the base of the hair to protect the dog's skin. When the comb goes through easily when you check for knots, you've done your job well. You're stars...give yourself both a treat!

Regular brushing is crucial, (even for breeds which are traditionally taken along to the groomer to be clipped or scissored - Schnauzers, West Highland Whites, Bichons, Cocker Spaniels, Poodles to name but a few). This will avoid the formation of matts, (always check behind the ears, near the tail, on the legs, under shoulders and thighs, and on the tummy) which can be so tight in the end that groomers will need to clip them out, and depending where the matting is, that lovely coat may be spoiled. Many people take their dogs to the groomers because they don't want to or can't do the work because of illness. If you are this owner, check with your groomer to see if you can bring your dog in frequently for a brush out only, and if they will give you a special rate. Professional groomers cannot do the impossible, and if your dog is not used to being brushed, it will not be quick or easy when he comes in matted after months of neglect....and it will be an unhappy experience for the dog and costly for you. Brush your long haired or thick or curly-coated dog at least twice a week. Enlist the help of the family, and get advice from your local groomer on brushing and brushes if you are unsure. A good groomer will always be happy to give advice in these matters, and it's in their own interest to take on customers whose dogs are not matted to the skin.

If you have a new puppy or dog, try to get him used to being groomed as soon as possible. Even if he is not very long haired, there will be times when he will need handling to be brushed or to have his feet or nails trimmed. Start with a bristle brush if you just want to get him used to the idea, but progress to a slicker very early or you will end up with matts. Grooming is easier on your back if you can get your pup up on a table, and you have an advantage because he can't and won't attempt to get away quite so easily. Get a non-slip mat so he doesn't slide all over, and hold him steady while you brush him. Professional groomers have special tables and light restraints which enable them to use two hands, but dogs that are used to being groomed and handled from an early age will be used to standing and will stay still, patiently allowing a person to groom them. Try to build up to that. Talk to him and give him lots of praise, but don't excite him. Steady him gently. Give him - and yourself - breaks. It can be tiring! Put him down if the phone rings or you need to leave him, for safety. Never leave a dog unattended if he is tied or up on a table. When you brush around his back legs or tail, he will try to sit down, so slip your non-brushing arm under his tummy in front of his back legs to hold him up and to restrain him. He won't like you brushing around his beard, especially if he is matted, so hold his mouth closed with one hand over the top of his muzzle, grasping the lower jaw with your thumb and forefinger, and be firm. (Let go and let him breathe every few seconds though!) Keeping his head still will be crucial when he visits the grooming parlour and has to have the hair trimmed on his ears and face, and especially over his eyes. Again, take it easy, don't get mad, remember it may all be new and scary.

## **Bathing**

The all-important question! When? How often? What kind of shampoo? Well, does the comb slide through freely? Does he smell? Is his coat greasy? Then bathe him. (Or take him to the groomers if you can't cope with the mess, the lifting, or he is an escape-artist). If you use a good quality shampoo, you can bathe as often as you feel necessary. And most important, rinse, rinse, rinse...and don't forget under the tummy and inside the thighs and shoulders. Many skin conditions are caused by soap left in. Watch out for his eyes and ears; cover them when you put water on the head. If the dog has long ears (Spaniels for example), don't forget to soap and wash the hair on the ears and especially that area behind the ears which tends to get dirty and matted. Don't bathe a dog that is matted if you can possibly avoid it...the matts will get tighter and pull the poor dog's skin. If you must, then put some de-matting spray in first (see below). Shampoos are available from all pet shops, but you can also obtain good quality shampoos, conditioners and other products from specialist grooming suppliers: Dezynadog, Groomers (Newbury), Simpsons. All have online ordering facilities (<http://www.groomers-online.com/>; <http://www.simpsons-online.co.uk/>; <http://www.dezynadog.co.uk/>) or your local groomer may be able to supply some products for use at home.

## **And finally: Nails (claws)**

Many dogs that lead a sedentary life or who spend little time walking on pavements will need to have their nails trimmed. Does your dog have dew-claws? Don't forget to check these especially – they can curl right around in all dogs, even those with short nails elsewhere, and will start to dig into the skin. Nail trimming is something which is difficult for everyone, and the dog is often very ticklish in his feet and legs so it is a very hard task for some owners. You might prefer to take him to the groomer. If you want to attempt this yourself, you need to buy a good pair of clippers. There are different kinds, but in most cases the scissor shaped type (Millers Forge) are the most effective – I think it's easier to see where you are cutting, but the most important is a sharp blade. Knowing when to cut the dog's nails is the first step. You may be lucky enough to have a dog with light nails where you can see the quick. Or you may have a dog with black nails where you can see nothing. Look at how the paw sits on the ground when the dog stands. Are the ends of the nails touching the ground? Are they so long that you can see the nails bending to the side or standing up? In this case, they need to be cut. When you pick up the foot, you may also feel the nails curling over, a sure sign they are too long. Find a position that is comfortable for you and the dog. Lying down is great (the dog I mean!). But if he is standing, face towards the rear, (he can't see what you are doing so easily) bend the foot at the ankle, clear away the hair, and clip from underneath. When you start, you need to just 'tip' the nails – take off the very tiniest amount, especially if you can't see the quick. The nails should be cut straight across, or at a slight upwards angle...up at the front. Try not to catch the quick...the nail will bleed profusely and although it is not dangerous, it is distressing. If it does happen that you cut a bit too short, don't panic, (and don't let the dog go or the bleeding will continue), put a dab of cornstarch on the tip of your finger and press it onto the end of the nail. Speak reassuringly to the dog, and try to calm him. Hold it for about thirty seconds and it should stop. There is also a product called 'Quicksure' or 'Trimmex' which is available from grooming suppliers. If it's difficult for you, do one a day so you can keep calm and relaxed. And if you

have a puppy, I would advise you to take him to a groomer or ask the vet to show you....if he has a bad experience the first time, he may be harder to handle and be very scared the next time. A groomer might charge you £5 or so to do the nails, but in the end it may be worth your while. Have a look at web sites about nail trimming to help you. You will see that there are many different ways to do it, but most important is calmly and quickly, with sharp clippers, and a little at a time. Have a look at these sites for some examples:

<http://www.canismajor.com/dog/nailsv.html>

<http://www.thepetcenter.com/gen/nailtrim.htm>

<http://www.lowchensaustralia.com/grooming/nailclip.htm#2> (I like the tip in this one about clipping matchsticks, and there are good pictures of the different types of trimmers)

Good luck!

**Produced for the Mayhew Animal Home  
by Amanda Bewlay-Robinson**