



Paw Prints

Jodi Schneider McNamee
Columnist

The importance of grooming your pet

You've been busier than normal and haven't had time to groom or brush your long-haired Shetland sheepdog in quite a while. You've started to notice that he's been scratching a lot, even though he's already been treated for fleas and ticks. So you decide to bring him for a visit to the groomer, and what she discovers after bathing your furry friend is an underlying skin condition causing him to feel very uncomfortable and itchy.

Grooming isn't a canine luxury, it's a necessity — and you don't have to break the bank to keep Fido groomed. Grooming is essential to the health and comfort of your pet; it allows you as a responsible pet parent to spot health problems before they become serious, or even life-threatening. Grooming on a regular basis allows you to look and feel for lumps, bumps, and injuries.

Brushing helps to remove

dirt and loose, dead hair and helps prevent mats and tangles.

Dirt and oils can accumulate under mats and cause painful skin infections. And that the mats themselves can be painful as they pull the skin underneath. Severe matting can even affect your furry friend's ability to see, walk, and eat normally.

If you find a mat in your pooch's hair, do not pull on it. Pulling can be painful. There are special brushes and combs available to help split the mat up.

With some dog breeds, grooming is a little more involved. Breeds such as collies, Alaskan malamutes, etc. are "double-coated" which means they have a downy undercoat underneath a harsher layer of long hair, and the down can mat like a layer of felt against the skin if left untended.

Each breed is different and some dogs — like a short-haired terrier — will be easy compared to a curly haired poodle. Some folks prefer to hire a professional groomer because they don't have the time to do it themselves.

Many dogs benefit from an occasional bath that goes along with brushing to remove dirt and excess skin oils that can sometimes cause skin conditions and unpleasant odors.

Another part of grooming that is important for your furry friend is nail-trimming. Keeping Fido's nails trimmed can help avoid some painful conditions such as

torn or overgrown nails. Just like with brushing, trimming his nails gives you an opportunity to examine the area for problems like cracked pads, swelling or injuries.

Most dogs benefit from having their ears cleaned on a regular basis, but that takes practice for the pet parent, so talk to your veterinarian if you suspect any ear problems such as ear mites, cheat grass or possible infection.

Brushing your pet's teeth is also a part of grooming. Although many pet parents don't realize it, brushing your dog's teeth regularly can go a long way in preventing periodontal disease. According to the ASPCA, periodontal disease is being recognized as a widespread problem in pets.

Some dogs seem to naturally enjoy the feeling of being brushed. Others, however, find it uncomfortable. You can usually tell the dog that doesn't like being groomed, because when your furry friend sees the brush coming, his ears will go back and he may try to hide from you.

The easiest way to train your dog to endure the grooming process is to start when he is still a puppy, although that is not always possible because you may adopt an adult dog.

Grooming should be a relaxing time for both you and your dog. It can become a special time that you both share together.

If your furry friend doesn't like being brushed, you may need to help change the way he feels about



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

A collie needs to be groomed on a regular basis.

grooming so that he can tolerate it better and even begin to enjoy it.

Start by going to a quiet area with him, a place where he enjoys being, such as outdoors on the porch. Bring a handful of extra tasty treats along with his brush. Try

speaking softly to your dog; slowly and gently stroke him with the brush in a non-sensitive area.

Cats usually groom themselves, but a weekly brushing for a short-haired cat or daily grooming for a long-haired cat is also important.



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