

## Chapter 1

# What Good Grooming Is All About

---

### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding why grooming is important to your dog's health
  - ▶ Tallying up the costs of grooming
  - ▶ Determining which dogs (and coat types) need the most and least grooming
  - ▶ Figuring out when to do it yourself and when to hire a pro
- 

**I** know that when I think of grooming, the vision of the froufrou doggie beauty parlor springs to mind, complete with bows, silly hairstyles, and nail polish. I've got news for you: I've never put a bow in my dogs' hair, and my dogs would protest mightily if I even suggested painting their nails.

But grooming's important. No one likes a bad hair day. Your dog certainly doesn't; he feels just as uncomfortable as you do when his hair is all ratty and snarled. But grooming is more than just having him look and feel good; it's vital for his health. And it's more than just a bath — it includes brushing, combing, keeping his teeth and ears clean, clipping his nails, and keeping him in top shape.

In this chapter, you get an overview of dog grooming and why it's so important for your dog's health and well-being. You also find out how much time and money it takes to keep your dog well-groomed and when a little help from the pros is more than just greatly appreciated — when it's a necessity.

## *Big Hairy Deal: Discovering Why Grooming Is Important*

Your dog isn't healthy if she doesn't look good outside. A lackluster coat or one that's plagued with external parasites and sores is just the tip of the iceberg. If she looks icky outside, she probably feels icky inside, too. That's because her coat mirrors her health. Her outward appearance can be a signal of internal problems that no amount of brushing can fix. Look at the following sections for some of the various reasons grooming is important to your dog's overall health.

## *Sociability*

When your dog is clean, you want him around more so you can bond and enjoy each other's company. Sure, he likes to play in the dirt and roll in stinky stuff, but he also likes how it feels to be clean, just like you do. And although he doesn't care how he smells (except when he's had the misfortune of meeting up with a skunk — check out Chapter 15 for more about deskunking a skunked pooch.), you do! You're less likely to enjoy having a dirty, smelly dog around, but a clean, refreshing one is definitely a more enjoyable companion.

## *Presenting a positive public image*

Keeping your dog clean says something about you; it says that you're a responsible dog owner and that you care for your dog. You may be able to take your dog places where dogs aren't usually allowed. When practical, I've actually taken dogs to book signings and shopping malls — where dogs aren't usually permitted. One look at my dogs told the people in charge that I take care of my dogs and that they're well-mannered.

Your dog no doubt will join you on walks outside your home, but you may have occasion to do other things with your dog, such as go to special events or even compete in various dog sports and activities. Maybe you'd like to do some social work like visiting the sick or elderly. Your dog can become a therapy dog, but being clean and friendly is vitally important for your dog under those circumstances (see Chapter 5 for more about brushing and bathing your dog). No one wants to pet a dirty dog, no matter how lovable.



Dogs aren't always allowed everywhere you'd like to take them, no matter how well-behaved and well-groomed they are. The reason some places are off limits has to do with health department regulations, so make sure that you always get permission before taking a dog to a place that doesn't normally accept them.

## *Eliminating the spread of dirt and disease*

Dirty dogs track dirt into your home and get dirt on your clothing, furniture, and carpet.

Ungroomed dogs are more likely to be infected by internal and external parasites, and external parasites — fleas and ticks — can harbor dangerous diseases, such as bubonic plague, typhus, Lyme disease, and Rocky Mountain spotted fever, which can make you and your family sick. If your dog is ungroomed, she may be carrying funguses such as ringworm that young kids

and the elderly can pick up from her. Keeping your dog clean and free from these problems through good grooming eliminates many potential health problems.

## *Determining whether something's really wrong with your dog internally*

Plenty of good reasons exist for grooming your dog. One such reason is finding out the difference between a coat that looks bad because it's dirty and one that looks bad because something is wrong with your dog. Grooming also eliminates various problems associated with an ill-kept dog, such as external parasites or open sores caused by a matted and dirty coat that traps bacteria.

A lackluster coat can be a sign that one or more things are seriously wrong with him, including

- ✓ Poor nutrition
- ✓ Allergies
- ✓ Internal parasites
- ✓ Hormonal imbalances or diseases
- ✓ External parasites
- ✓ Cancer
- ✓ Other diseases

Any one of these problems can severely shorten your dog's life, or in extreme conditions, even kill your dog. Knowing how to groom your dog so that he looks the best he possibly can helps you separate potential health problems from problems caused by not properly caring for your dog.

## *Considering the Necessary Investment*

Now that you know that good grooming is necessary for your dog's health and well-being, you may wonder just how much it costs to have a good-looking dog. You may have visited the local groomer and asked how much bathing and/or clipping your dog costs. If you've done the math, you know it can be a bit pricey, especially when money's in short supply.

The truth is that when you start grooming your dog, you can do things just to get by, all the while keeping an eye out for the many places where you can

buy really good equipment and supplies for not a lot of money. (Be sure to check out Chapter 3 and the Appendix for some good sources for grooming supplies.)

Your investment, however, isn't gauged entirely in terms of money. Your time is worth something, and grooming requires some of that, too.

You may find that grooming is expensive in time *and* money, or you may find it relatively inexpensive. Much of the cost of grooming depends on what kind of dog you have, what type of hair your dog has, and whether you're grooming your dog as a pet or for show. Regardless of cost, grooming is a part of dog ownership, and as a pet owner, you must take care of your dog for her health and well-being — not to mention how really spiffy she'll look.

Anyway, the sections that follow can help you figure out how much time and money you need to keep your pup well-groomed.

## *The cost in money*

Most people think and talk about costs in terms of money. You know: How much in dollars is this or that going to cost? Well, the bad news is that getting stocked up with grooming equipment and supplies is fairly expensive (see Chapter 3 for more about the costs of supplies). The good news is that after you dole out the initial investment for your equipment, you probably won't encounter that expense again unless something breaks or wears out, and by comparison, the cost of buying your own supplies is relatively cheap.

How much does at-home grooming cost compared to a year's worth of grooming sessions from a pro? Well, if you're paying from \$20 to \$50 a month in grooming, you're paying \$240 to \$600 a year. You can buy some pretty nice grooming equipment for that amount of money, and doing it yourself pays off during the first year or two.

Some dogs need more grooming equipment and supplies than others. For example, a dog who needs daily brushing and regular clipping is going to need more equipment than a dog with a wash-and-wear coat. (See "Familiarizing Yourself with Your Dog's Coat" in this chapter for more on fur types.)

## *The cost in time*

Although the old adage that time is money is true where dog grooming is concerned, you nevertheless need to think about the work and the fun you can have when you bathe or brush your dog. As you know, grooming your dog is as much a necessity as housetraining your dog or taking him to the vet for an annual exam.

When taking time into account, be aware that

- ✓ The shorter the natural coat of the dog, the less grooming he's going to need.
- ✓ The smaller the dog, the less grooming he's going to need.
- ✓ Dogs who need stripping (see Chapter 12) or clipping (see Chapter 11) usually take more time than dogs who don't.
- ✓ A dog with long hair (see Chapter 13) or a double coat (see Chapter 9) takes more time to groom than one with a medium- or short-haired coat (see Chapter 8).
- ✓ Different procedures take different amounts of time. A quick brushing with a well-maintained coat takes less time than a bath (see Chapter 5).
- ✓ The condition of your dog's coat dictates the amount of time grooming takes. Brushing out a clean dog with a well-maintained coat takes very little time when compared to one with a dirty and matted coat.
- ✓ Dogs with wash-and-wear coats can usually get away with once-a-week grooming.
- ✓ Dogs with average coats can usually get away with twice-a-week grooming.
- ✓ Dogs with high-maintenance coats need to be groomed three times or more per week.
- ✓ When some dogs are adolescents or when they're shedding, they require coat care *every day*.

When planning your initial grooming session, you need to set aside at least two hours, because you'll be going more slowly and your dog's coat may not be in the best condition. Later, you can whittle down your grooming sessions to an hour or even a half-hour as you get better at grooming and your dog's coat is better maintained.



If you don't have the time to groom your dog's coat into good shape, consider first taking him to a professional groomer and then maintaining the coat after the groomer works it into manageable shape. Doing so reduces the hassle of trying to groom your dog's coat into the proper condition without using too much of your valuable time.

## *The added investment: Grooming for show*

Grooming your dog for show costs plenty more in terms of time and money over what you'd spend on grooming a pet dog. Special show clips (see Chapter 11) and stripped breeds (see Chapter 12) usually take a while to develop and maintain. Many coats need special leave-in coat conditioners, bodifiers, and coat dressings. See Chapter 18 for more information about grooming your dog for show.

## Familiarizing Yourself with Your Dog's Coat

Dogs have some of the most amazing coats, ranging from curly to straight, puffy to wiry, bald to long. Their fur comes in short coats, long coats, and every variation in between. Some dogs even come equipped with dreadlocks!

It's truly hard to believe that the wolf produced descendants with such wide varieties of coats, but it did, and that means you're going to have to evaluate the type of coat your dog has and what that means in terms of the grooming equipment and supplies you're going to need. In the sections that follow, I fill you in about the differences in the basic types of coats.

### Coat types: Single versus double

Dogs basically have two types of coats:

- ✓ Most dogs have a *double coat* (also referred to as a *two-ply coat*) that has a top coat and an undercoat. The *top coat* is composed of stiffer *guard hairs*, which tend to be naturally water-repellant. Top coats protect the dog's skin and undercoat, acting as a natural guard against the elements. The *undercoat* is a fleecy or downy type of fur that's a bit shorter than the top coat. The undercoat serves as insulation to keep the dog warm during cold or inhospitable weather. The dog sheds (or *blows out*) the undercoat twice a year — it's a seasonal thing.
- ✓ Some dogs have a *single coat*, in which only a top coat is present without an undercoat, often making dogs with this kind of coat shed less than their double-coated counterparts.

You can tell what kind of coat your dog has in two ways. The first way is easy: Read the American Kennel Club (AKC) breed standard for your breed and look under the *coat* listing. The second way is to part the hairs on your dog's coat to find out whether it's a longer, harsh coat combined with soft, downy fur. If so, your dog has a double coat. If the hair is more or less even and doesn't have an undercoat, then your dog has a single coat.

Both types of coats, however, have different issues when it comes to grooming, so be aware that one type isn't necessarily better than another. Knowing the type of coat your dog has helps you determine how to groom him properly. Knowing whether your dog is going to go through a seasonal shed, or blow his coat, is also important — no sense in being surprised when your dog leaves enough hair on the rug to knit three more dogs his size!

## Defining coat terms

Many funny-sounding words are associated with dog coats. They're worth mentioning, because you may come across them when working on a particular breed or reading a particular breed standard (see Part II of this book). Here's a rundown of various coat textures and what they mean:

- ✓ **Blow coat:** Describes the yearly or biannual shedding that some dog breeds go through. The coat comes out in handfuls during a short period of time.
- ✓ **Bristle coat:** A wiry or broken coat, or can mean *bristly coat*, such as the one worn by the Chinese Shar-Pei.
- ✓ **Broken coat:** See *wire coat*.
- ✓ **Corded coat:** A coat that has dreadlocks.
- ✓ **Crinkly coat:** A wire coat found on the Wire (Haired) Fox Terrier.
- ✓ **Curly coat:** A coat with curls, like that of the Poodle or the Curly-Coated Retriever.
- ✓ **Double coat:** A coat with an undercoat and a top coat.
- ✓ **Guard hairs:** See *top coat*.
- ✓ **Linty coat:** A coat that has an unusual soft, downy texture. (Also what your light-colored dog gets when you carry her around while you're wearing black cashmere.)
- ✓ **Open coat:** A sparsely haired coat; usually a single coat.
- ✓ **Out of coat:** Describes a dog who has shed his undercoat and is waiting for his new coat to grow in. Out-of-coat dogs usually are not as pretty as when they're in full coat.
- ✓ **Pily coat:** A coat with a dense, harsh top coat with a soft, fur-like undercoat. Usually found in Dandie Dinmont Terriers.
- ✓ **Single coat:** A coat that lacks an undercoat.
- ✓ **Smooth coat:** A short coat that lays back against the dog's skin.
- ✓ **Stand-off coat:** A long coat that does not lay flat against the body but stands straight up. (Also the kind of coat your dog will have if the two of you can't come to terms about grooming.)
- ✓ **Top coat:** The outer coat that protects the dog's skin and undercoat. Usually harsh and weather resistant.
- ✓ **Two-ply coat:** See *double coat*.
- ✓ **Undercoat:** The downy second coat that lies beneath the top coat. It usually is shed once or twice a year.
- ✓ **Wire coat:** A type of harsh coat that may be single or double with stiff, wiry hairs.

Whenever I talk about double coats in this book, I talk about them in two ways. One is to describe dogs who have what can be considered a *natural coat* — that is, a coat with two layers. The second way is to describe longer-haired breeds that have those two-ply coats that obviously need more care than the standard medium coat.

## Coat textures

In the same way there are different types of coats, different coats have different textures. Understanding the texture of your dog's coat is crucial for proper grooming. The following list describes different coat textures:

- ✔ **Smooth coats:** The smooth-coated or short-coated dog has very short hair that lays back against the dog's skin. A smooth coat can be either double-coated or single-coated, depending on the breed. These coats tend not to be much of a hassle when it comes to grooming — even though they do shed. Dalmatians and Bulldogs have his kind of hair.
- ✔ **Wire coats:** The wire coat (broken coat) is a type of coat that is wiry on the outside and often has a soft undercoat on the inside, but it can be a single coat. Wire coats are wavy looking, but when you pet them, the hair feels a bit coarse. Think Terrier when you think about wiry coats. These coats usually need to be stripped or clipped, which adds an extra step to the average grooming routine (see Chapters 11 and 12).
- ✔ **Curly coats:** The curly coats are few in number, but you'll recognize them. They're the Poodles, the Portuguese Water Dogs, and the Irish Water Spaniels. These dogs have curly coats that require extreme maintenance, including clipping and brushing (see Chapters 7, 11, and 14).
- ✔ **Corded coats:** Dogs with dreadlocks or corded coats have coats that are twisted into dreadlocks. These coats need a fair amount of work upfront to prevent the hair from tangling into mats. After the cords are twisted, keeping them well-maintained takes time (see Chapter 10). Dogs with corded coats include the Puli and the Komondor. Poodles can also be corded.

## Coat length

Besides different textures and types, canine coats also come in different lengths. Don't forget that shorter coats in general are easier to groom than are longer coats. Check out the other differences in the list that follows:

- ✔ **Hairless dogs:** On one side of the spectrum is the hairless or near-hairless dog (see Chapter 8). These dogs are quite lacking when it comes to hair, although some breeds like the Chinese Crested actually have some hair on the head or legs (and the Powderpuff variety is a hairy dog!). But just because they're hairless dogs doesn't mean that you don't groom them. Although you may not be brushing their hair, their skin requires plenty of attention.
- ✔ **Short coats:** Dogs with short coats are pretty much the wash-and-wear dogs. Their coats don't offer them much protection against the elements, so they're more likely to have problems with cold climates than their



furrier counterparts. They may be single- or double-coated. Examples include the Basenji and the Beagle.

- ✓ **Medium coats:** Dogs with medium coats tend to look pretty good. A medium coat is not so short that the hair doesn't give the dog protection; furthermore, it isn't so long that the hair tangles or mats terribly. Medium-coated dogs usually are double coated with both a top coat and undercoat, but unlike dogs with the long-haired double coats, they're usually a bit easier to groom (see Chapter 8). Border Collies and Cardigan Welsh Corgis have medium coats.
- ✓ **Long coats:** Dogs with long coats often are the show stoppers of the dog world. Long and beautiful, they attract oohs and ahhs wherever they go. But all that beauty has a price. Long-coated dogs often are single coated and prone to mats and tangles if their hair isn't kept up. If your dog has a long coat, you can expect long grooming sessions or trips to the grooming parlor (see Chapter 13). Afghan Hounds and Irish Setters have long coats.

## Coat color

Dogs come in a variety of colors — everything from black to white and every shade in between, or so it seems. And their colors come in many different patterns including bi-color, tri-color, and *brindle* (where the dog is mottled with brown and black — often looking like stripes). Colors and color combinations depend a great deal on the breed and whether they are acceptable as part of the breed standard.

Some shampoos and conditioners help bring out the best in your dog's coat. When buying supplies, you can look for the ones that make your white dog sparkling white, your black dog glossy black, or your brown dog look his very best.

## Having the Proper Tools on Hand

Different coats require different grooming methods, and different grooming methods require different equipment and supplies. After you familiarize yourself with your dog's coat, you have a better idea of what tools and supplies you need to properly groom your dog. For example, depending on your dog's coat, you may be simply brushing and bathing, or you may be clipping or stripping it, too.



Good grooming requires more than brushing, bathing, and possibly clipping your dog. It also involves routinely trimming his toenails, brushing his teeth, cleaning his eyes and ears, and possibly expressing his anal sacks. Chapter 3 explains what equipment you need to tackle these jobs and where to find it, and Chapter 6 provides the instruction.

## *Coaching Your Canine to Be Groomed*

Grooming your dog requires a bit of a partnership. Although you don't necessarily need your dog's full compliance when grooming, it sure makes things easier!

Good grooming starts when your dog is a puppy. Getting her used to routine tasks, like being brushed and combed and having her feet handled so you can clip her toenails, is all part of grooming. Otherwise, your dog may fight you, and you may end up with results neither of you will like (at worst, an injury; at best, a bad hair day).

Teaching your dog simple cues, such as Sit, Down, and Stay, is important to wise grooming. If you can't keep your dog in one place, it's very hard to do anything. Chapter 4 provides advice for training your dog to enjoy grooming (or at least tolerate it and cooperate).

## *Taking Note: Keeping a Grooming Diary*

A grooming diary is an invaluable tool for grooming your dog. It doesn't have to be fancy — just something in which you can make notes to keep track of what you've done and how your dog looks and reacts.

Jot down the following list at the front of your diary and be sure to include this basic info about each grooming session:

- ✓ **Date:** This lets you know when your last session was.
- ✓ **Grooming procedure(s):** Did you simply trim your dog's nails and brush his teeth, or did you groom him from nose to tail?
- ✓ **Possible health concerns:** Note that the coat looks dull or is greasy, for example, or include other changes that may warrant a trip to the vet.
- ✓ **Behavioral changes:** Track how your dog responds. For example, if your dog is antsy when you put him on the table, was he antsy before, or is this something new you're working with?
- ✓ **Notes:** You may develop a new technique that you want to try again in the next grooming session — the notes can serve as a reminder.

## Choosing a low- or high-maintenance pup

Grooming can arguably be a piece of cake or a nightmare, depending on your patience and the breed of dog you've chosen. Although I don't think you should choose your dog strictly on the basis of whether the dog needs little grooming, I think it is something that should factor into everyone's decision-making process when choosing a dog.

Which dogs are low maintenance when it comes to coats? Think short and medium coats that don't need clipping and don't need a lot of brushing and detangling (but they do shed). Here is a partial list of some dogs with low-maintenance coats:

- |                     |                              |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| ✓ Basenji           | ✓ German Shorthaired Pointer |
| ✓ Beagle            | ✓ Great Dane                 |
| ✓ Boston Terrier    | ✓ Labrador Retriever         |
| ✓ Dalmatian         | ✓ Pointer                    |
| ✓ Doberman Pinscher | ✓ Rottweiler                 |

Why would anyone want a dog with a high-maintenance coat? Well, as you've seen, they can be very beautiful. Owners and breeders like that certain look that you don't see with a short-coated dog. The dog's temperament figures in, too — many people like certain temperaments that come in a particular package. Here's a partial list of some dogs with high-maintenance coats:

- |                           |                               |
|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| ✓ Afghan Hound            | ✓ Poodle                      |
| ✓ American Cocker Spaniel | ✓ Portuguese Water Dog        |
| ✓ Dandie Dinmont Terrier  | ✓ Puli                        |
| ✓ Keeshond                | ✓ Samoyed                     |
| ✓ Kerry Blue Terrier      | ✓ Soft Coated Wheaten Terrier |

If you're in the market for a new dog, I suggest you do your research thoroughly and choose a dog not merely based on looks but also on temperament, health, activity level, and of course, how much grooming you're willing to do. Check out the following books to help you choose wisely:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| ✓ <i>Dogs For Dummies</i> by Gina Spadifori (Wiley, 2000)            | ✓ <i>Bring Me Home: Dogs Make Great Pets</i> by Margaret H. Bonham (Howell Book House, 2005) |
| ✓ <i>Choosing a Dog For Dummies</i> by Chris Walkowicz (Wiley, 2001) |  |

Writing down everything about your grooming session while it's still fresh in your mind is important. You can keep your grooming diary with your tack box (or whatever you use to carry your grooming gear) so that it's ready to go when you need to make notes.

## *Knowing When to Call a Pro*

Although you're ready to invest your time and money in grooming your pooch, you may run into situations in which you need to rely on the skills and advice of an expert. Precious, your Bearded Collie, may tangle with a sticker bush, and you may not have time or patience to pick every last sticker out of her coat. Maybe Rex, your Great Dane, is easy to bathe and brush but a gigantic pain when you're trimming his nails and brushing his teeth. Perhaps you adopted a dog who's never been groomed before, and you need help getting his coat into shape so you can then maintain it. You may even love to keep Sissy, your Standard Poodle, in a New Yorker cut, but you can't trim your own bangs.

If you're an honest soul who has admitted to yourself that you have neither the time nor inclination to do it right, there's no shame in that. And why should there be? You call a plumber when your sink faucet is spraying water. You have a teacher teach your kids. You buy an airline ticket to fly across the country instead of going to flight school. You pay someone else to do plenty of tasks that you can't or won't do, so nothing's wrong with hiring a professional groomer for your dog.



Assigning children to groom the dog usually isn't a reliable alternative to routinely grooming the dog yourself. No matter how much your kids promise that they're going to take care of the dog (including grooming), don't believe them. This task ultimately falls on an adult in the household. Younger children are neither responsible enough to take care of a dog without adult supervision nor capable of tackling the grooming process. I say this from experience. I've seen many dogs given up to shelters or given away because they were originally "for the kids," but when it came down to it, the children weren't responsible enough to care for a living, breathing being.

## *Considering the cost*

Most pet owners hesitate to look for a professional groomer because, quite frankly, it's costly. Yet that's all a matter of perspective. If you take three or four hours to groom your Standard Poodle, paying someone \$45 to \$65 to bathe, brush, and clip your dog is actually a deal.

The cost of having a professional groom your dog varies widely depending on where you live and what you want done. Time- and skill-intensive procedures like stripping or clipping coats cost more than a simple bath and brush out. Problem coats (matting and tangles) also add to the cost.

Keep these points in mind when considering the cost of grooming:

- ✓ Most groomers charge between \$35 and \$70 for complete grooming.
- ✓ Some groomers charge more or less depending on the breed, the location (New York City is more expensive than Great Falls, Montana), the size of the dog, and the type of work done.
- ✓ Dogs with matted or dirty fur cost more, and so do dogs who need a show trim.
- ✓ Groomers add from \$8 to \$12 for mats and add at least \$40 for show cuts over the average cost of grooming.



Most but not all groomers offer baths, brushing, clipping, stripping, ear cleaning, and nail cutting as part of their services. Ask what the full grooming price includes. Some groomers won't quote a price until they see your dog and can gauge how much work grooming your dog will be.

Most dog owners who use professional groomers have their pets groomed once a month and then maintain their coats with brushing and combing.

## *Looking for a professional groomer*

Now that you've decided to use a professional groomer, you can look for one by simply opening the Yellow Pages to *Dog Groomers*, closing your eyes, and pointing to an entry. On the other hand, I have a better method.

### *Finding a professional groomer*

Finding a groomer is pretty easy. You're likely to see a shop on the corner in your neighborhood, but you may not be sure whether that groomer is any good. Here are the steps you need to go through to find a good one:

- 1. Ask your dog-owning friends whether they use a groomer for their dogs or know of one they'd recommend.**

A good recommendation is worth its weight in gold. If your dog-owning friends praise a particular groomer, go with that one.

- 2. Ask your veterinarian what groomer he or she recommends.**

Sometimes your vet will employ a groomer onsite.

- 3. Look for groomers near you in the Yellow Pages or online at**

- **Find A Groomer Directory ([www.findagroomer.com](http://www.findagroomer.com)):** This groomer directory is the pet owner's side of PetGroomer.com ([www.petgroomer.com](http://www.petgroomer.com)). Groomers list themselves here. You can search by city and state or even by zip code.

- **BreederWeb.com** ([breederweb.com/services/dogGroomers.asp](http://breederweb.com/services/dogGroomers.asp)): This resource is another good one to use in your search for a groomer.
- **DexOnline.com** ([dexonline.com](http://dexonline.com)): Use this Internet Yellow Pages site to do a search on “dog grooming” in your city and state for a listing.

### *Certifications*

Certifications are a mixed bag. Plenty of good groomers who have well-established businesses and do an exceptional job are not certified. Considering a groomer who is neither certified nor professionally trained depends on whether that groomer has a good reputation and references that check out. If so, that groomer probably is a good bet.



A certified groomer is someone who is professionally trained and certified to a certain standard. You don't know what level of expertise a groomer who hasn't been certified has achieved. An uncertified groomer may be better or worse than someone who is certified. With certification, you know the standard to which the groomer should be able to perform.

Certifications are offered through certain grooming schools and through the National Dog Groomers Association of America (NDGAA). You can find out more about NDGAA certification at [www.nationaldoggroomers.com](http://www.nationaldoggroomers.com) or check out Chapter 19 and the resources listed in the Appendix.

## *Screening the professional groomer*

After you find a professional groomer you're interested in using, you need to determine whether that groomer is the right one for your dog. Not all groomers are comfortable with all dogs, and some groomers prefer to work only with certain breeds.



Some groomers may use tranquilizers, especially with difficult-to-handle or aggressive dogs. I don't recommend tranquilizers at all, except under extreme circumstances, such as a totally freaked out pooch. If you don't know whether a groomer uses tranquilizers, ask. Dogs prone to seizures can experience seizures when administered certain common tranquilizers. Tranquilizers also make dogs more susceptible to problems caused by changes in temperature, such as hypothermia and heatstroke.

### *Knowing the right questions to ask*

Let your fingers do the walking here. You can prescreen most professional groomers over the phone to find out whether they're right for you and your dog. Here are some questions you'll want to ask:

- ✓ What hours are you open for business?
- ✓ Are you available for emergencies or after hours?
- ✓ How long have you been in business?
- ✓ What are your certifications? With what organization?
- ✓ How many clients do you see?
- ✓ What breeds do you see most of?
- ✓ How many <insert breed here> do you see?
- ✓ Are you comfortable with working on <insert breed here>?
- ✓ How much do you charge for a full grooming? What procedures does a full grooming include?
- ✓ How do you handle difficult dogs? Do you muzzle or tranquilize them?
- ✓ Do you use cage dryers? If so, how often do you check on dogs with cage dryers?
- ✓ What do you charge for just a bath and brushing? Nail clipping?
- ✓ How many staff members do you employ?
- ✓ What other services do you offer?
- ✓ Do you have an emergency on-call vet? Who is it?
- ✓ Do you have references?

### *Visiting a professional groomer*

After you prescreen the professional groomer on the phone, it's time for a visit. Ask whether you can drop by and check out the groomer's facility some time. The grooming shop should be neat, clean, and organized. If the shop is especially busy, you may find hair and water on the floor, but overall the shop needs to leave you with a good impression.

Watch how the groomer and staff members handle dogs. Are they gentle and caring, or do they move the dogs around like they're just another commodity? Watch body language; from it you generally can tell whether the groomer is just going through the motions or sincerely likes what he or she is doing. Although everyone is entitled to a bad day, the groomer shouldn't take out any frustrations on the dogs.

After you're convinced that a particular groomer is the one for your dog, make an appointment. You may need one or two sessions to really decide whether the groomer is a good fit.



A dirty or terribly chaotic and disorganized grooming shop may be a sign that the groomer doesn't have enough staff and may not have time to care for and watch all the dogs, especially the ones in cage dryers. When that's the case, you may want to look for another groomer.

## *Becoming a Pro Yourself*

You may enjoy grooming so much that you're thinking about becoming a professional groomer. After all, you like dogs and may have a knack for grooming pooches. However, before you hit the books and start working toward your certifications, remember that going pro means that you're going into business, and you have to be a savvy businessperson in addition to being a dog groomer.

Be sure to check out Chapter 19 for more information about becoming a professional groomer.