

GROOMING

By Kathleen Dillon

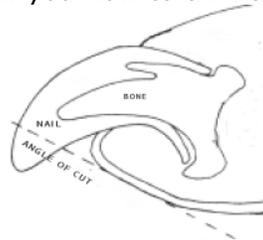
Grooming – its a good way to keep track of what's going on with your dog structurally and is a bonding time as well. Puppies who are introduced to grooming early and regularly usually grow into adults that relish the attention and especially the brushing. I have had dogs that actually strutted their stuff after being groomed. Women can relate to that feeling – when you walk out of the salon with a new do and just feel good about yourself!

On the serious side, grooming presents an opportunity to catch problems early, such as ear infections, parasites, unusual lumps, tooth problems and that sort of thing. Regular grooming also accustoms a dog to being handled by others such a veterinarians. Fortunately, our breed does not require complicated or professional grooming, and no stripping or plucking so it's quite uncomplicated.

Start a grooming routine right away with your pup. They'll wiggle and squirm and not want their nails cut, but just like the child that doesn't want his ears washed they have to learn. Don't get nervous or irritated, stay calm and talk soothingly to your young one because they will sense your stress and theirs will only increase.

Nail cutting can be the part that a lot of owners get nervous doing, nobody wants to hurt their dog. But it's something that must be kept up with for both your sake and the dog's. Nothing looks worse than an adult dog who's toes are spread or can't walk properly because the nails are too long, and puppies have sharp nails that grow very fast that can inadvertently cause painful scratches. So nail trimming cannot be neglected. The more often you do it the easier it gets for both you and your dog.

During the puppy stage trimming should be done at least once a week because the nails grow so quickly. Nail trimming will not need to be as frequent for an adult dog because the nails don't grow as quickly as they do when they're a pup and the surface an adult dog walks on can also help keep nails worn down. If clipping nails makes you nervous, just clip off the tips each time. When trimming avoid clipping past the curve of the nail or you risk hitting what is called the quick, which is painful and causes bleeding. If you're not sure where that is, ask your vet to show you how to trim the nails.



Part of the grooming process of the feet should include examining the footpads and between the toes for foreign objects or injuries. In between nail trimmings, I'd suggest that you handle your pup's feet. Just hold them and feel between the toes. It gets the pup used to having his feet handled. It can be a real struggle trying to trim nails on an adult dog that doesn't like anyone to touch his feet!

Brushing and combing is a relatively easy task with our breed of dogs. Brushing will remove dead hair, dirt and tangles and distribute the skin's natural oils through the coat. During shedding season a daily brushing will keep loose hair under control. Everyone has their own preferences in brushes, but a sturdy metal comb to remove tangles should be standard equipment kept on hand as well as any of your favorite brushes. Combing through the dog's feathers will keep them looking handsome. Be sure you comb out those ears without overlooking the area directly behind the ears, which is the one area that seems to mat most frequently if left unattended.

Any breed with ears that hang down are more susceptible to ear infections, so after a bath or swimming make sure you dry out the inside of the ears. Cotton swabs (definitely not q-tips) work nicely for this. Check inside the ears for dirt and, depending on your area of the country, foxtails and ticks. When cleaning out the ears of an adult dog, wipe them out gently and no deeper than the first knuckle on your finger. If you notice a discharge or an unpleasant odor you should take the dog to the vet.

Many pet owners ignore dental care, but dogs do have soft plaque that hardens into tartar. By brushing your dog's teeth he'll have fresher breath and you can avoid periodontal disease and veterinarian cleanings, which require anesthetizing the dog. Human toothpaste can upset a dog's stomach, so you should use some made especially for dogs or you can use a baking powder and water paste. To start off the tooth brushing routine, use your finger or a gauze pad and gently scrub. Later you can graduate to a toothbrush made for dogs if you desire. There are also dental bones made especially for plaque and tartar removal as well.

The belief in the past was to bathe your dog only when it was dirty because shampoos were much harsher than they are now. If you acquire a gentle shampoo a dog can be bathed weekly, if you desire, without drying out its coat but weekly bathing is generally not a necessity. Flea shampoos can be quite harsh and can cause varying reactions, from allergies to toxic reactions and even liver damage in dogs due to the insecticide that is one of the ingredients. My personal preference is to use Frontline for flea and tick control and stay away from insecticide-ridden products such as sprays, flea shampoos and the flea collars. When choosing a flea and tick application product I always make certain it is one that is NOT absorbed into the blood stream.

If your pup is scared during its first few baths, try talking to him calmly and soothingly while you're washing him, telling him what a good boy he is. Water too warm or cold can keep a pup trying to hop out of the tub, and I've found that the rushing sound of water coming directly out of the faucet is usually what causes pups more concern than the act of getting wet. You might as well get set up correctly right from the start and get a spray hose that will attach for his baths. They cut down on the noise of the water and produce a gentle spray that the pups don't mind and the hoses also help you reach the pup's underside much easier. Practice makes perfect and if done regularly, grooming time can be an enjoyable ritual and a time of bonding.

Brushing out the coat on a regular basis removes any loose hair that may end up in your house otherwise and also eliminates the formation of any mats. Though French brittanys do not shed as badly as many breeds, they do shed some. The coat of a French brittany should need little to no clipping. Areas you can cut if needed is the tail if there's a tuft of long hair that grows there, the fringe on the backs of the legs or the underbelly. Use a pair of scissors when doing this, not hair clippers and never clipper your dog's hair on it's back, sides or head. Once you do that the hair will not grow back the same. If there are going to be mats form it is generally behind the ears or on the rump, so simply keep those areas simply combed out.

After your dog comes in from hunting or hiking with you, you should check him over to make sure there are no burrs or grasses that have stuck to his coat or his feet. Left untended these things can cause matting and sores and foxtails can be life threatening.

All in all, French brittanys are a very easy breed when it comes to grooming so don't skip this part of dog ownership. You'll find that your dog will come to relish being brushed and fussed over!