

PUTTIN' ON THE DOG

GROOMED YOUR POOCH LATELY? FOUR PROS TELL HOW TO KEEP YOUR CANINE COMPANION'S FUR, SKIN, NAILS AND PAWS PERFECT.

They say it takes a village to raise a human child; at least a few pairs of hands are needed to maintain your pup too — or your adult dog. Veterinarians provide medical care, dog sitters and dog walkers help out when you need a break and, of course, dog groomers keep Fido looking and feeling his best. But what do groomers learn that pet owners don't just naturally know? BERGEN asked four of the county's top groomers to share their tips.

OUR DOG GROOMERS



Cait Lauria, owner, Groomington Coat Factory, Midland Park; pet "parent" to five dogs, one cat and one hedgehog



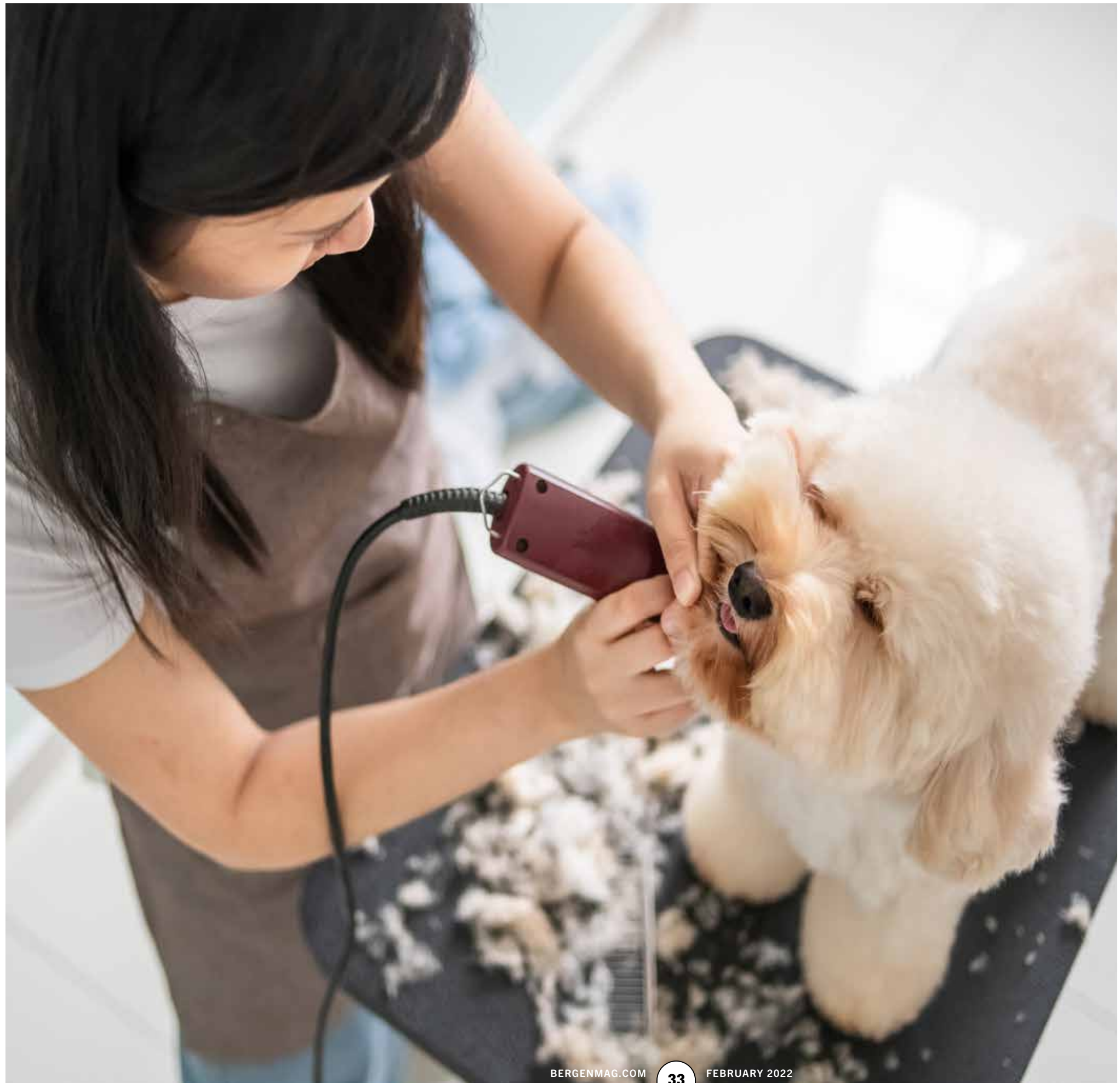
Helen Maggi, owner, Preppy Pampered Pups, River Vale; three dogs

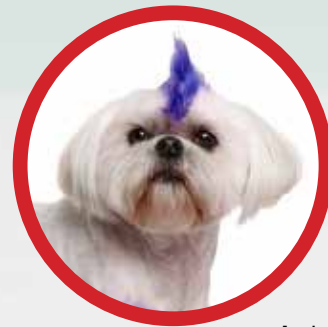


Christina Ostro, owner, The Pawsmetologist, Teaneck; two cats and one dog



Noemi Reyes, owner, Knot Too Shaggy, Wyckoff; two dogs





GROOMING: There's no hard-and-fast rule on how often your dog should be groomed. "This depends on many factors, such as long hair vs. short hair, whether the dog has skin issues and whether he or she is outside a lot," says Helen Maggi. But the average recommendation is every four to six weeks to ensure they're staying healthy and fresh.

Brushing and combing properly are essential to pup hygiene because they remove dirt, mud and salt from their coats. The key: Don't just brush the surface, but get close to the skin to prevent knots and matting. "Brush, then comb one area at a time, paying special attention to areas that mat easily," says Noemi Reyes. "This includes behind the ears, the chest area and between the front legs and backsides near the base of the tail."

The type of brush you use should depend on your canine's coat type. "A smooth or flat-coated dog will benefit from a soft-bristle brush; a double-coated dog can be brushed with a slicker brush and comb, and long-haired dogs definitely need brushing with a slicker or pin brush and combing," says Christina Ostro. For longer-haired dogs, she says, use your slicker brush, starting from the back paws, and work up and then toward the front of the body to avoid damaging the hair.

Final touches: Cait Lauria adds that leave-in conditioner after a brush can prevent split ends and damage, so don't forget this final step. "Conditioner also closes the cuticle of the hair shaft that keeps the skin hydrated, especially in winter," adds Ostro.

BATHING: Dogs don't need daily bathing as humans do; on average they can get along, says Maggi, on a bath every four to six weeks. But bathe your pooch more often if he or she is an active creature with a special knack for getting dirty.

Choose a moisturizing shampoo that meets your pet's specific needs—mild if they have sensitive skin or allergies, medicated for skin irritations, "tearless" for puppies. The product should be a high-quality brand such as Les Poochs, as "worse-quality shampoos can damage the coat and dry out the skin if used too frequently," says Lauria. Other issues

can arise from improper or infrequent bathing, adds Ostro, since "the skin and coat are a dog's first line of defense against environmental pathogens, toxins and debris."

GENERAL HYGIENE: Even if the fur is in tip-top shape, don't forget upkeep on other important areas such as your dog's nails, teeth and footpads.

Nail clipping should be a priority for dog owners—aim to check on nails' length every two to four weeks. "Dogs who get their steps in on pavement will require less frequent nail trimming than those who walk on grass," says Ostro, because pavement essentially files the nails down. "Nail trimming also helps the quick, the nerve in a dog's nail, to recede, and keeps the nails short," says Maggi. "To trim a nail, you need to identify where the quick is and trim on an angle the way the nail grows to avoid injury." The process may sound intimidating, but "clipping can be pleasant if the dog is desensitized to having his or her feet touched and handled," says Reyes. That means start them early! And a pro tip: Keep styptic powder or gel on hand in case of a minor bleed.

Teeth should be brushed daily as yours are, but at a minimum, brush a dog's pearly whites three times a week "to control tartar buildup," says Reyes. A dental chew is a good supplement to regular teeth brushing too, says Lauria. But if your dog just ain't having it, says Ostro, "ask your vet about non-brushing alternatives such as enzymatic toothpaste and water additives." Because dog breath can be the worst.

Paw pad maintenance is important for dogs, as pads help regulate their body temperature. "Clean feet and footpads when your dog comes inside to reduce licking, especially if your dog is prone to allergies," says Maggi. Reyes recommends wiping pads with hypoallergenic baby wipes after a long walk. You can trim them (not cut them!) if you'd like too, which helps with traction on smooth flooring. "To trim, simply glide a clipper blade over the pads without getting between the toes," says Ostro.

I'LL BE DOGGONE!

Dog groomers' craziest experiences? Our experts recall these:

■ "The owner wanted a bob haircut on a male Yorkie," says Christina Ostro of the Pawsmetologist in Teaneck. "There was to be long hair on the top and the sides of his head, with a very long bang crossing over his face. Hairspray was required for the look. By the end, he looked like what is known as a Karen."

■ "I've been asked to do Mohawks, paint dogs' nails and airbrush or dye their hair," reports Helen Maggi of Preppy Pampered Pugs in River Vale, who also volunteers a list of things she's found in dogs' fur: "lollipops, Jolly Ranchers, stickers and a little plastic army man."

■ Recalls Noemi Reyes of Knot Too Shaggy in Wyckoff: "Shortly after my grand opening, I was grooming an Afghan hound with a nervous stomach. As I was working around her rear legs, she had a sudden bout of explosive diarrhea! Well, I had to cut off my pullover grooming smock (because I was NOT going to pull it over my head), and I threw away my sneakers too! The funny thing was that I had just installed security cameras in the shop the day before. So yes, there is video."

■ "A 3-month-old German Shepherd puppy came in that was being returned to the breeder because the family didn't want to care for him anymore," remembers Cait Lauria of Groomington Coat Factory in Midland Park. "The poor thing threw up in his crate on the way to the airport, and the owners called us in a panic because they weren't sure he would be allowed on the flight if he was dirty. My German Shepherd-loving husband happened to be at the salon that day; he had always wanted one and this was his golden opportunity. We called the breeder to see if we could keep him, and now we have Crue! A normal day at the salon ended up being an adoption day for a sweet pup, and we gained a new member of our family."

FUR YOUR PUP'S OWN GOOD

Dog fur is more susceptible to matting in the cold months. Three tips from our grooming pros:

■ **Use sweaters sparingly.** Cute as they are, sweaters, harnesses and anything hugging your pet's body can cause a lot of matting.

■ **Dry Fido off.** Use a towel after playing outside, comb out any clumps of snow that have formed, then brush them out immediately to prevent knots.

■ **Buy booties.** If your pup is willing, try a pair of booties in the winter months to keep his or her feet dry and mud-free. A pet balm is also great for protecting paw pads from snow, ice and salt.

