

# Wash and Brush Your Persian/Exotic Cat to Perfection

Get great grooming tips for the show ring or just at home with your Persian/Exotic cat.

Cats are glorious creatures and they bring lots of joy into a person's life. They are incredibly affectionate yet it's their independence that makes them so very unique. However, in order to keep a long-haired cat like a Persian happy and healthy, it's really important to make sure they are regularly and properly groomed.

Grooming your cat will help you form a very strong bond with them. However, occasionally it's a good idea to take your pet along to a grooming parlour so they can be pampered by a professional. However, learning how to brush and comb your cat yourself is really important so the experience is an enjoyable one for both you and your feline friend.

## How to Brush and Comb a Persian

Cats love grooming themselves and will spend around 10 percent of their time doing just this – when they are awake that is. They lick off all the excess fur found in their coats as well as any dirt found on it. However, some cats are better at grooming themselves than others. Because Persians have such thick coats it's especially important to brush and comb them on a regular basis and the more frequently you do this, the more your pet will enjoy the experience. It's important to understand the difference between a cat brush and a cat comb. You should use the comb to get rid of all excess hair in your pet's coat as this will help prevent the risk of them developing a hair ball. Combing also allows you to check for fleas and any sort of injury which you would otherwise not be picked up on. However, you need to be very gentle when combing your cat especially if you find any tangles in their coats. The thing to bear in mind, is that Persians have pretty fine fur and if you pull too much, you will end up hurting your pet which could end up making them resent being groomed.

You should use the cat brush to fluff up your pet's coat after having thoroughly combed it through, this way anymore excess hair will be removed which is important to prevent fur balls. You also need to invest in the proper equipment because using a normal hairbrush would prove to be a waste of time. You can buy complete cat grooming kits from good pet stores or even online which consist of everything you would need including the all-important flea comb.

## Early Grooming is Essential for all cats.

It's important to groom young kittens as early as possible so they get used to the routine and learn to enjoy the experience. Persian kittens have extremely fine hair so you need to make sure you are very gentle when you first start combing and then brushing them. Persians that have not been regularly groomed when young, can be that much harder to brush which means you need to be extra careful and take all the time it needs to get them used to the experience.

You should never try to groom an adult cat for too long if they don't like it, but rather do this in short bursts making it into a sort of "play time". If you have trouble getting your pet to accept being groomed, you might want to take them to a grooming parlour so the experts can help your cat get used to being combed and brushed. As your pet gets more used to being groomed, you can increase the amount of time you brush them. Persians need to have the occasional bath and a professional groomer would be able to expertly do this for you.

## Every Day Grooming is Essential

Long-haired Persians need to be groomed on a daily basis and the best time to do this is in the evening. Combing and brushing their coats shouldn't take more than around 10 minutes or so and it's a great way to bond with your pet, especially if you make it into a "play time" for them too. However, you should also check their ears, eyes, noses and around their back ends. Checking their teeth on a regular basis is essential to make sure there's no excessive build-up of plaque or a broken/damaged tooth.

The Persian cat's glorious coat has lured many a cat-lover into the Persian's lifelong service. But the coat is a demanding taskmaster. Neglect it for a few days and the miracle of matchless grace has turned into a glaring mass of knots. The dedicated Persian owner must be willing to keep an ever vigilant eye (and comb) to keep a Persian as

smooth as silk, and as soft as cotton. It's well worth the effort.

## Brushing /Combing

The glorious Persian's coat is “unnatural” in that it doesn't appear in truly wild cats. It's beautiful, but impossible to maintain even for the self-grooming, fastidious cat. Your help is required. Groom your Persian every day if you can. If that's not possible you may be able to get by on every other day, but you do risk mats forming, which isn't only unsightly, but dangerous, since the skin beneath can become infected.

Begin grooming your Persian while it's still a kitten, just to get it accustomed to the idea. Some breeders start when the tiny kittens are only 3 weeks old! If your kitten has been handled kindly from such an early age, it should be quite tractable (for a cat) when it comes to grooming time. A very thorough brushing session should take about 15 minutes. This is also a good time to look for cuts, abrasions, sores or even the dreaded flea.

A metal comb may look like a simple grooming implement, but it's really closer akin to a magic wand; a few deft strokes daily are your cat's protection against snarls, mats, tangles and knots. Begin with the wide-toothed comb (10 teeth per inch) to help loosen any large snarls, then proceed to the fine-toothed comb (20 teeth per inch) for the smaller snarls and the face. (Stay away from nylon combs. They generate static electricity. Don't ignore the hair under the armpits and behind the ears. The hair here is finer than in other areas, and more prone to tangles or mats. The rump and back of the legs are also mat-prone areas. And don't forget the belly!

When you discover a knot, just gently tease it apart. Don't pull on the knot — you'll only hurt the cat and leave an ugly, raw, bare patch of skin. If necessary, you can use a de-matting tool.

De-matting tools come in a variety of different designs, but all are made to eliminate mats without destroying coat length. (Some are even available for lefties. One popular model has sharp (but recessed) blades to cut through the mats, with transverse tines to comb out and smooth the hair. Some models have small teeth on the blades which help collect the hair. You may have to try out several models before you find the one that works best for you. Using scissors can be dangerous — one spring from the cat in the wrong direction and you could end up stabbing it. Cat skin is extremely thin and tears very easily.

Another reason not to use scissors is simple aesthetics. Not only will scissors leave an ugly hole in your cat's coat, but cutting the hair unevenly will make it harder to trim in the future.

If the knot is simply intractable, you may be able to cut it out with small, blunt-nosed scissors, but first slide your comb under the knot between the mat and your cat's skin. You certainly don't want to cut the skin. Skin under mats can be very sore and tender, so use care.

In some cases, you can prevent mat-formation by applying a little grooming powder to a mat-prone area. It doesn't always work, but it does absorb some of the grease and it's certainly worth giving a try. Grooming powder is not baby powder, by the way. It's important to use the correct product—you can purchase it in grooming-supply stores, pet-supply stores and even online!

Another necessary tool is a natural stiff-bristle brush, but its main use is to fluff the coat after combing. The metal comb does all the hard work. When the cat is combed out, brush it vigorously against the growth of the hair. This will make it fluffy and stimulate the growth of new hair as well.

If you're going to show your cat, a pair of curved scissors comes in handy for trimming excess hairs, but that's different from cutting out knots.

Done regularly and with love, your Persian will come to regard its grooming sessions as just another way of being the centre of attention — which is what it really wants, anyway.

## Bathing Time

Longhaired cats actually benefit from a bath once or twice a month, and the more frequently they're bathed, the more they get used to it, but you need to brush out the coat thoroughly first; otherwise, any knots in the fur will tighten and become inextricable.

Before you begin, make sure that the bathing area is warm — it should be at least 23-24 degrees for the cat's comfort. Since cats don't naturally take to water, you will need to be both firm and gentle. Speak in a calm and soothing tone.

Before you begin, make sure you have all the materials you need at hand—and everything else out of the way! The last thing you want is to try to hold a squalling cat with one hand as you reach for the shampoo on the other side of the kitchen. The wet cat will escape and destroy everything in its path.

The simplest way to bathe the cat is to fill a basin (or the kitchen sink) with 4 to 5 inches of warm water. Place a mat in the bottom of the sink to give your cat some traction. Most cats accept this procedure quite well, but if your cat tries to scratch, hold it firmly by the scruff of the neck. (This is not cruel, but it's effective!)

Wet the coat, then lather the cat all over, using cat-specific shampoo.

Persians tend to get a little greasy, so some groomers pre-bathe these cats with a degreaser such as a Dawn dishwashing liquid. If you need to degrease your cat's coat, do it before the shampooing. You can usually apply the degreaser directly to the coat, although some people prefer to dilute it first. In any case, add water and lather thoroughly. Then rinse it completely away. One way to do this is a simple process called, in Persian circles, "floating the coat." This means you ease the cat under the water (not its head, of course) so that the coat rises up; this allows the water to penetrate all the way to the skin. Then let the cat up. Do this several times in succession.

Degreasers do make the coat fluffy, but can rob it of important oils, which you will need to add back before the coat becomes permanently damaged. For that purpose, a hot-oil treatment cooled to "lukewarm" (one specifically made for pets) or a specially formulated shampoo works very well. After shampooing, remember to thoroughly rinse out the suds from the hot-oil treatment.

After your pre-bath with a degreaser, it's time to shampoo the cat. It usually works best to mix up the shampoo first with water, then pour the mixture over the cat. If you apply undiluted shampoo directly on the cat, it can be extremely hard to get it out.

Colour matters, too. If you have a white Persian, choose a shampoo with a brightening or "bluing" agent. Be sure to use a cat shampoo designed for your cat's coat colour for optimum effect. Black cats, on the other hand, do best with a darkening shampoo. (These cats should also be kept out of strong sunlight if you plan on showing them—black cats can literally fade in bright sun. They also don't take well to over-drying.) Each basic colour has a shampoo designed to bring out its hidden glory, so give your cat the edge up by selecting the right shampoo especially if you plan to show.

Washing the face can be particularly challenging. It's best to mix just a little shampoo (about 30%) with some water (70% water) and wash carefully, using a soft toothbrush around the eyes and nose. You can follow the shampoo with a cream rinse if desired.

Finally, rinse very carefully. Don't forget the underside. It will take at least twice as long to rinse the cat as it does to wash it.

Then towel dry the cat. Show groomers may blow-dry their cats at a low temperature, but pet owners can usually just let them air-dry in a draft-free environment. If you blow dry, direct the airflow backward against the lay of the hair on the upper body. Then work along the sides, forward to the front legs and up the neck. Dry each part completely before moving on to the next section. The tail, belly and back legs should be done last — cats have little tolerance for people fooling with those areas. If your Persian is going to be get testy, it's best that it happens at the very end of the session rather than at the beginning.

## **Check Your Pet's Teeth Once a Week**

It's important to keep an eye on your cat's teeth too and if they are used to having them cleaned, you need to do this at least once a week. If you've adopted a rescue cat and one that has never had their teeth cleaned, your best bet is to take them to the vet to have their teeth checked on a regular basis and to offer them dental sticks on a daily basis. If you do brush your cat's teeth, make sure you use a toothpaste that's been specifically formulated for use on cats.

## Eye Care

Because of their short noses and muzzles, Persians have more problems with eye debris than other breeds. The comparatively large eye openings placed too close to the nasal tear ducts create an area that is prone to tearing. In most breeds, the tears gather in the ducts; in Persians, they may spill over the lower eyelids. Also, when the tears come in contact with the air, they are oxidized and turn brown, staining the under-eye with a tough, gluey substance. To keep your cat comfortable, you need to keep this area clean. Wipe your Persian's eyes with a damp, clean cloth (no soap) once or twice a day. Don't rub the eyeball directly, of course.

If you think your Persian has excessive or unusual tear-staining, consult your vet. If there's no medical problem, you can try one of many commercial tear-stain removal products. Offering your cat distilled water, in place of tap water, to drink may also alleviate the tear-stain problem.

## Don't Forget the Ears

Inspect your cat's ears every week. Unattended ears can turn into homes for ear mites, bacterial infections, yeast infections, allergies and even fungal infections around the tips of the ears. Regular cleaning will do much to prevent such infections and infestations. Gently examine the inside of the ear. Redness can indicate an allergy or inflammation, black debris suggests ear mites, and green or yellow discharge is characteristic of an infection. Other warning signs include head shaking. A slight amount of waxy build up is normal.

Many cats resist having their ears cleaned, so you may want to use a towel for restraint. Put a big thick towel on a table, put the cat on the towel, and warp it up, with the tail and head left exposed, then, bring the back end of the towel over to the front, just behind the cat's head. Now the tail is covered. Finish by tucking the loose ends underneath. Your cat is now ready, not to cook, but to have its ears cleaned." This method will let you hold the cat with one hand, so you can clean the ears with the other.

Of course, if you have a good-natured cat, restraint may not be necessary. Cats really dislike restraint, so use as little as you need to get the job done. It also helps to use small cat treats to keep the experience as positive as possible. Don't combine ear cleaning with other possibly unpleasant experiences such as bathing or nail clipping.

Clean the ears with a gentle ear cleanser or a medicated wipe (available through your vet or at pet-supply stores). If you're using a liquid cleanser, partially fill the ear canal with the product. Pull the ear straight out (gently) with the flap of the ear between your thumb and forefinger to allow the liquid to flow deep into the ear. Then massage the base of the ear for 15 or 20 seconds; your cat will probably enjoy this part! Allow your cat to shake its head; this will remove much of the debris present in the ear. If you've been well instructed by a vet or professional groomer on how to safely use a cotton swab to wipe out the debris, you may do so, but don't probe so deeply that the cotton tip disappears from view. It's safer to use a gauze wipe or cotton ball and your finger. A cotton swab can damage the delicate tissue or even break an eardrum, especially if an infection is present. If your cat is on medication for ear mites or has an infection, apply the drops in after the ears are cleaned.

## Nail Trimming

Typically, a cat has five claws on each front paw and four in the back.

Trim the nails every 10 to 14 days, and begin early, while your cat is still a kitten. Surprising an adult cat with its first nail trim is likely to yield undesirable results.

A good time to trim the nails is right before you bathe your cat — not for the cat's sake, but for your own. Even the best-behaved Persian can get a bit grumpy at bath-time!

You can purchase special cat nail clippers at pet-supply stores. Start by holding one paw in your hand, with the forefinger below the toe nail you wish to clip. Place your thumb over the top of this same toe and squeeze gently — the entire nail will appear. Clip the nail just in front of the pink area. This area is hard to see in cats with dark nails (luckily a distinct minority). If you can't see the quick (the vein inside the nail), clip just below the point at which the

nail begins to curve downward. If you feel uncomfortable, ask your veterinarian's technician to show you how.

Be careful not to cut into the quick — it will bleed and it hurts your cat. Always keep some styptic powder on hand in case you make a mistake. Some brands have benzocaine in them, which will stop or greatly reduce the pain associated with quickened nails.

## Face Sculpting

Show groomers and people with show cats may attempt "face sculpting," a cut that's designed to show off your Persian's trademark expression. You can begin face sculpting when your kitten is about 5 months old. For equipment, buy a pair of small, blunt, curved, high-quality scissors and a pair of thinning shears. You may also need a stripping knife to even out a mix of long and short hairs. To use a stripping knife, hold it with your thumb on the top, rounded portion of the blade. By holding the knife at different angles, you can remove just a few hairs or a whole section — it's best to practice on a non-show cat until you get the hang of it. You can find these supplies at your local pet- and grooming-supply store and online.

Begin after your cat is brushed and bathed. Put the cat on a contrasting surface — you will need an eagle eye.

Think round. The best way to get an eye for this is to take lots of snapshots of your cat's head from various angles. Once the basic cut is made to your liking, it's easy to maintain, and you'll only need to pluck stray hairs away occasionally."

Start rounding the ear with the curved scissors. Ears should not stand out in this breed, but the fine round cheeks should be emphasized. Trim the hair away above the eyes if it is so long that if brushed down would cover the eyes. Use the thinning shears to trim away the "horns" that sometimes grow on the side of the eyes and spoil the outline. Don't cut off the whiskers, but you can hand-pluck any excess hairs — just a few at a time, please! Remember — you can't put it back.

Whether your grooming is simple and functional, or designed to take first prize at the local cat show, your Persian's supreme elegance will shine through and through.



This is a very well sculptured Exotic shorthair.

## Lion Cuts

If the knots in your Persian's fur are truly awful, you may want to consider a lion cut, in which part of the body is shaved, sort of like a Poodle. As in the Poodle, the tail, legs and "mane" are left long. Not surprisingly, cats are not allowed to be shown in this cut, but it's still quite striking. (However, your cat may need a sweater to keep warm in the winter.) If you don't like that look, you might opt for having your cat shaved down completely until a new coat can grow out. Don't try to do this yourself — ask your vet or a professional groomer.

## Before and after a Lion cut



## Super Groomer

If you decide to take your cat to a groomer, choose one who's familiar with cats. Many groomers specialize in dogs and some lack the extra gentle skills needed for cat grooming. This is especially true if you have a cat with a matted coat. These coats can often be saved, but it requires a patient expert. Talk to your vet or breeder about someone in your area who is capable of this delicate task. Groomers are particularly adept at handling aggressive cats. Often, a cat that will act out with its owner becomes more docile in the hands of a trained professional.

## Quick Tips of How to Brush Your Long-haired Persian

- It's easier to groom your cat if they are on a table or bench – although some cats prefer it if you brush them when they are on your lap
- Using the metal comb, first, gently brush your pet starting at their heads and working your way right down to their tails, removing any knots and tangles without pulling on them as you go. You need to brush under the chin and belly which cats love, but remember, the hair is that much finer so you have to do this extra gently
- Using a flea comb, repeat the process being extra careful not to press too hard as this will end up hurting your pet
- Using a cat brush, fluff up your pet's coat and to take out any excess hair that may still be in their coats

Below are examples of very popular grooming brushes, combs and grooming sets.

