

No More Fears: Follow These Quick and Simple Cat Grooming Tips

All you need is a dose of confidence and our experts' tips to make your cat shine.

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Crouched on top of a picnic table, Woobie and Maximillian, a pair of Himalayans, and their housemate, a Persian named Ling-Ling, sharply survey the birds darting among the trees. Indoor cats, they're so absorbed by the great outdoors they scarcely notice the grooming nooses their owner has slipped over their heads. Nor do they seem to care that she's armed with an array of brushes, combs and nail clippers.

Weather permitting, the backyard is an ideal place to groom the cats, says the trio's owner, certified master groomer Kathy Salzberg of Walpole, Mass. Focused on the outdoor sights and sounds, the cats allow her to work with little or no protest, and she's able to keep the amount of loose hair inside her home to a minimum. "I like to do it outside when it's warm because it's a messy job with all that hair - and they're so distracted looking at the birds and the trees they don't know what I'm doing," she says.

Almost before the cats know it, the grooming session is nearly over. Their longhaired coats are once again luxurious and tangle-free and their nails have lost their sharp edges.

Inside, Salzberg uses a cotton ball and warm water to clean the buildup from Ling-Ling's tear ducts; part of a Persian's required daily maintenance. "If I don't, he looks like a dirty-faced little boy," she says. Next, she may trim a little of the hair around the cats' hindquarters, a routine part of grooming longhaired cats. "With all that coat, their personal hygiene leaves a little bit to be desired as they get out of the litter box," Salzberg says. Four times a year, she gives each cat a bath.

Sound daunting? It doesn't have to be. Done correctly, grooming can be quick, painless and a powerful bonding experience for you and your cat. It requires more than technical expertise and knowing which brush to use, says Pam Johnson-Bennett, a feline behaviorist, veterinary technician and author of *Think Like a Cat: How to Raise a Well-Adjusted Cat, Not a Sour Puss* (Penguin USA, 2000, \$16.95) from Nashville, Tenn. How you approach the cat will largely determine the stress level of the session.

"Watch your attitude. Sometimes cats will pick up on your nervousness. If they know you're dreading it, they will too. You have to be very calm," she says.