

Grooming your long-haired pet regularly can help prevent matting.



Spring cleaning

With spring just around the corner, what cleaning jobs can you do to help get your pet ready for this wonderful time of year? **Tim Falk** finds out.

When the cold weather starts disappearing and the days start warming up, many pets and their owners start emerging from their winter hibernation and are ready to take on the world. Springtime is all about rebirth and starting afresh, which is why it's the perfect time of year to engage in some spring cleaning.

So if you're going to be dusting, vacuuming and washing your way around the house, why not take a few simple steps to ensure your four-legged friend is being looked after in the best way possible?

The first thing to remember when you're cleaning the house from top to bottom is not to use any products that could be harmful to your pet. "Harsh cleaning products such as bleach-based floor cleaners can be hazardous to pets, particularly if they walk over the surface of the

floor before it is thoroughly dry," says Dr Gretta Howard from Cherrybrook Vet Hospital.

"Cats are fastidious groomers and may lick these products off their feet and coat, leading to painful ulcers throughout the oral cavity and sometimes poisoning. Some dogs have a habit of licking surfaces and this can lead to similar problems. Consider boarding your pet for a couple of days to prevent problems while you are spring cleaning."

Some pets can become anxious when they sense their environment is being altered, so if you're moving furniture around and emptying cupboards to clean, your furry friend may become frightened and run away. Sometimes it is safest to have a pet minder or board your pet to avoid them escaping out of fear or getting in contact with cleaning products that may be harmful to their health.

Photo: Big Stock photo

"This may also motivate you to get the job done efficiently over an allocated weekend when your pet is being looked after," says Dr Gretta.

Wash away your troubles

A vital part of any cleaning regime is ensuring that your pet's bedding is clean and not harbouring any nasties. For indoor-only pets, bedding should be washed once every two to three weeks, but every one to two weeks is best for pets that live both indoors and outdoors. Importantly, washing your pet's bedding in hot water (at least 70°C) or placing it in the dryer can kill any flea eggs.

The next step is to give your pet's food and water bowls a good scrub. "I recommend providing a clean, fresh water bowl daily for pets," says Dr Gretta.

"It is important to remove any old food thoroughly through cleaning before replacing the food. Mouldy foods can lead to gastroenteritis and even toxicity. Pet food bowls can be put through the dishwasher too."

A day of spring cleaning is also the perfect time to check out your pet's toys to see if they're still in a reasonable condition and not a danger of causing any harm. Pets' mouths are full of bacteria, so for hygiene reasons toys should be replaced when they are starting to look worse for wear. This also avoids them disintegrating and being swallowed. "Dirty soft toys can be put through the washing machine and hard plastic toys can be put through the dishwasher if they start to smell," explains Dr Gretta.

Your pet's toys need to be checked regularly to ensure they remain safe. "Avoid soft toys with stuffing that can be swallowed and any toys that have the potential to fray with loose threads, as these could cause dangerous gastrointestinal blockages," explains Dr Gretta. Balls should be large enough not to be able to be swallowed and avoid tennis balls as the covering on them can wear the teeth down. It's a good idea to speak to your local pet shop about the most durable toys for pets, and choosing toys that enrich your pet's environment while you are out can help avoid separation anxiety.

Bath time

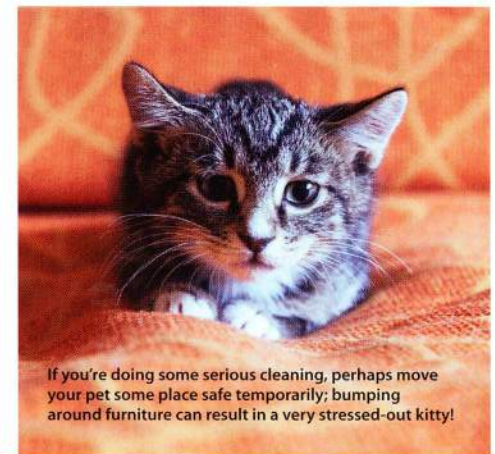
While spring cleaning is a great time to get on top of all those pet maintenance duties,

it's important to remember that you need to look after your pet all year round — not just once a year. One area where this is quite important is grooming. "Grooming is an ongoing maintenance requirement for long-haired pets and it is important to keep on top of it for the welfare of the pet," says Dr Gretta.

Allowing your pet to become heavily matted with knots can be uncomfortable, making it difficult for your pet to move around freely and go to the toilet easily. Long-haired pets should be brushed regularly to prevent mats from forming. Some pets won't allow their owner to brush them so it is best for these pets to have regular grooming appointments where their coat can be professionally clipped.

Reeda Close, a pet groomer from Nose 2 Tail Pet Care, says grooming your pet will help it look and feel good, and is vital for hygiene. "It's also a great way to spend quality time with your pet, particularly if you have put in the effort to ensure the grooming process is enjoyable from the start," she says.

If your pet's grooming requirements are too much for you to look after, Reeda recommends enlisting the help of a professional groomer. "With our current time-poor lifestyles, it can be very demanding fitting in the requirements to maintain your dog or cat's coat. Having your dog or cat regularly groomed means you can enjoy the benefits of having a pet without having to put in all the time to keep them maintained," she says.



If you're doing some serious cleaning, perhaps move your pet some place safe temporarily; bumping around furniture can result in a very stressed-out kitty!



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