Bathing and Grooming Poultry

When showing poultry, whether for exhibition or in showmanship, the condition and cleanliness of the birds are reflections of their owners. Designate an area for your show birds, and do not allow them to run with the rest of the flock. If possible, keep them in individual coops or cages during the show season to maintain condition and cleanliness.

Bathing

Birds should be bathed at least five days before a show. This allows the bird time to dry completely, oil to be restored to the feathers, and for them to groom their own feathers. Before you begin, gather the necessary items needed to bathe your birds.

List of Bathing Supplies

- Toothbrush – used to scrub the shanks, feet, toes, and toenails
- Apple Cider Vinegar – used to help rinse the shampoo out of the feathers. Use about ½ cup for a tub of water
- Shampoo – used to clean the feathers; do not use a harsh shampoo as it will make the feathers brittle. You can use a flea and tick shampoo recommended for cats or dogs, which not only cleans the birds but kills lice or mites gone unnoticed.
- Blow Dryer – used to dry loose-feathered birds if needed
- Towels – used to dry birds
- Nail clippers and file – Used to clip toenails and upper beak, and file the beak
- Sponge – used to wash the birds, particularly the head
- Cotton balls and styptic powder – to stop bleeding in case the nails and beak are cut too short
- Three tubs or 5-gallon buckets of warm water– to bathe and rinse birds; Note: You can use a utility tub with warm running water located in your basement, work room, etc., to wash and rinse your chickens instead of the three tubs. (Hand held shower heads are nice)
- Heat lamp or heat source if it is cold outside so bird's do not get chilled

Step 1: Hold the bird in one hand with the legs between your fingers and your other hand on the bird's back. Slowly lower it into one tub of water. Birds will typically enjoy the warm water. Some will go to sleep, so watch they do not drop their head into the water and drown.

Step 2: Put a small amount of shampoo on the bird and wash every part of the bird. Wash in the direction the feathers grow, taking care not to break any. You may need to wash the vent area and the ends of the wings twice to ensure cleanliness. Be careful when washing feather-legged breeds not to tear any feathers on the legs or feet.

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Step 3: Put the vinegar into the second tub and thoroughly rinse your bird.

Step 4: Put your bird in the third tub of warm water to make sure there is no shampoo left in the feathers. If you don't get all of the soap out of the feathers, they will clump together, look gummy and dull.

Step 5: Remove the bird from the third tub and wrap it in a towel. Make sure its head is sticking out of one end of the towel and its feet are sticking out of the other end.

Set 6: Use a soft toothbrush to clean the shanks, feet, toes, and toenails. Again, be very careful not to damage the feathers on the legs and feet of feather-legged breeds.

Step 7: With the bird still wrapped in the towel, clip the ends of the toenails and spur. Be careful not to cut into the quick (vein) or it will bleed. If this should happen, apply styptic powder using a cotton ball. Apply pressure until the bleeding stops. (Use flour, liquid bandade)

Step 8: Wash the face with a sponge or cotton ball.

Step 9: Clip the upper part of the beak and file the sides to match the bottom part of the beak. Never trim the bottom part of the beak.

Step 10: Remove your bird from the towel.

Step 11: Put hard-feathered birds in a clean carrier, coop, or small pen with clean shavings and allow to air dry. They will groom their own feathers and be dry in about 24 hours. Make sure the wet birds are not in drafts, or where it is too cool, cold, or too hot.

Step 12: It is best to let loose-feathered birds dry on their own. However, if you decide to blow dry these birds, do so on low heat. Be careful not to hold the dryer too close as the heat could hurt the bird's skin and feathers. Too much heat from hair dryers can damage feathers. Drying birds with a hair dryer can be a long process. Most birds look better if allowed to dry and preen on their own.

Once your birds are dry, keep them clean by putting them in clean individual coops or cages about the size of the show coop. Bed with dust-free shavings and keep the cages clean.

Use soapy toothbrush to gently scrub of any dirt on combs and wattles and around their face. Use the nail file to pick dirt out from under their toenails and from under the scales on their legs.
If the weather is too cool or cold, set up a place in your house for the birds to dry. If that is not an option

Grooming

Preparing your bird for show doesn't stop after bathing and some pre-show grooming! Once you arrive at a show, you should do some final grooming that will make your bird look its best for the judge.

Come prepared to the show with a grooming box. A plastic tackle box is great to carry your last-minute grooming items. Items to carry in your show box include:

NPIP Number and/or Paperwork should be in an envelope in your grooming box

Baby oil gel (coconut oil) – used to shine shanks, feet, combs, and wattles

Toothbrush – in case you find some dirt or manure on the feet

Styptic powder – in case you need to stop bleeding from anything

Cotton balls – used to clean feathers or apply baby oil

Nail clippers – in case you forgot to trim a toenail or the beak

Antibiotic ointment – to put on combs or wattles that have been scratched

Wet wipes or washcloth – used to clean legs and feet at the last minute

Silk cloth – used to shine feathers of tight-feathered birds

Band-Aids – in case your bird pecks or scratches you causing bleeding

(Use baby oil to enhance combs)

Electrical zip ties in case a partition is not solid

Clear plastic if you need to put around coop to keep birds from fighting

The show, including showmanship, will have a start time. Get there in plenty of time to coop in your birds. Touch them up at this time. Keep checking them to make sure they are still clean prior to the aisle being closed for judging, or when your showmanship class is called. Do any final touch up as close to judging as possible. It is important you stay clean for showmanship, so when touching up your birds wear an old shirt or apron. A carpenter's bib apron with front pockets keeps your clothes clean and gives you places to put things.

Follow these steps:

Step 1: Remove your bird from the show coop and check it over for any dirt or manure that may have gotten on it. Use a damp cloth or baby wipes to clean the feet, toes, and vent area, or any other dirty spots.

Step 2: Using either a cotton ball, cloth, or your fingers, put a tiny amount of baby oil gel on the beak, comb, wattles, earlobes, shanks, feet, and toes. For feather-legged breeds, put just a little on the bare parts of their legs and feet. Also, put a dab on the spurs.

Step 3: Smooth out any rough feathers by running your fingers down the shaft and putting the web back together. You may need to do this feather by feather, paying particular attention to the wings and tail feathers.

Step 4: Use the silk cloth to rub the bird from head to tail several times, always going in the direction the feathers lay. Rub the underside, also.

Step 5: Remove any soiled bedding in the show coop. Put your bird back in and gently give it one last wipe with the silk cloth.

Remove the water from birds with beards and muffs until the judge is finished. You do not want the feathers wet. You can also use a (need to find out what it is called) waterer where the bird can only get its beak wet and the beard and muff stays dry. Pop bottle waterer

Also remove the food after their evening feeding so your bird's crop is not full. A full crop can change its appearance.

Always monitor your birds. If the judge is taking a long time to judge your class, and it is a hot day, do not let your birds go too long without water.

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Sources:
Bathing and Grooming Poultry for Show: An Easy-to-Follow Manual for the Beginner, Megan and Makayla Kinard, APA-APA Youth Program
Tim Bowles, Lucasville, Ohio