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## **BATHING AND GROOMING YOUR CHICKEN FOR A SHOW (Basics for the beginner)**

Never, never, never take a dirty bird to a show. Dirty birds very rarely place well, they just don't get far as a bird in great condition and groomed like a show bird. The next time you are at a show take the time to look at the birds. Really look at them, stand back and see if you can see what the judge sees. Why did the judge place one bird over the other? In some shows, the placement can be very close and the difference between your bird being placed on champion row and one that is left in the cage, can come down to it being in condition, clean and well groomed. Can you see and tell the difference in a bird in great condition, not necessarily just well bathed & groomed. **CONDITIONING IS DIFFERENT THAN GROOMING.**

Getting your bird "show ready" is not a big secret that only the top breeders know. Not only is it easy to do, but also your bird will actually enjoy the process. Some breeds take special skills when bathing, this is just the basics for you to start with.

Bathing your bird is done 3-5 days prior to showing. This allows time for the bird to completely dry and to work some of its own natural oil back into the feathers. Grooming starts with a bath, by trimming the nails and beak, and ends with the final, last minute touch-ups at the show just before it is judged.

To start the process, you need to gather your supplies and place them within ease reach. The attached list is simple and basic. Of course, you can be more elaborate if you wish, but I have found that the basic method works well for most birds. Some of the extras you might want to have on hand are: hair conditioner in the final rinse water, blood stop in case you cut the nail too short, and a spray on shine product for showing animals.

Start with 3 tubs of warm water. These tubs should be large enough to give you plenty of water and room for a good bath. Don't try and bathe a large fowl bird in a small plastic bucket. It just won't work. I use washtubs in the laundry room.

The first tub is used for the bath. Hold your bird the usual way with the breast resting in your palm and lower it into the water, allowing a few minutes for the bird to realize what is happening. Place an appropriate amount of shampoo on the bird (I put it on the dirtiest parts first, usually the feet and the vent area) and working with the direction of the feathers, massage it all over. They enjoy this so much that many times they will fall asleep. This really happens, so be careful that the head does not go under the water. Remember that feathers are damaged if you rub them backwards; be careful, work slowly but thoroughly.

Putting about ½ cup of vinegar in the water of the second tub is not totally necessary, but it does help completely remove the shampoo.

Rinse until no shampoo is left in the feathers. You may want to change the water or rinse the bird under running water.

The third tub is the final rinse. Some exhibitors use plain water and some put a small amount of hair conditioner in the water (not on the bird). Conditioner is not necessary and in some instances may even weigh down feathers and creating an unnatural appearance.

The main focus is to rid your bird of dirt and any “poo” that is on the bird. Remember, dirty birds don’t win.

Rinse, rinse, rinse until you are certain there is no shampoo left on the bird. Think of drying your hair with shampoo left in it.

**WARNING:** Never use bleach, or other harsh cleaning chemicals on your birds or in the washing water. Feathers are fragile and easily damaged. Some chemicals can cause birds to become ill or even die. If the birds need more than a simple bath in order for them to be shown, then the pens that they are kept in may need to be reevaluated or cleaned.

Next, roll the bird in a clean towel with the head out of one end and the feet out of the other (egg roll style). If you do this too loosely the bird can escape, but too tightly and the bird cannot breathe. Now is the perfect time for a pedicure because the toenails are somewhat soft from the water. Using the toothbrush, some soap and water, give the legs, feet and toenails a scrubbing. Be sure that you clean any “poo” from under the nails because judges do notice. Now clip the nails. Watch for the vein that runs down through the toe and into the nail so you do not clip into this.



In white toenail, it is easy to see, but in darker nails, you will have to look for the quick on the underside. If you cannot see, clip only small portions at a time checking each time. Should the nail bleed, it will be minimal if you have been careful. This will stop on its own or you can use the blood stop and a cotton ball.

Now wash the head area making sure the nostrils are clean. Scrub any loose skin off of the comb using the same soft toothbrush. Use soap and water and rinse clean. Do not get any soap in the eyes.

When your bird is totally clean, put them in a clean carrier, cage or pen where they can dry in a warm (not in the sun or in front of a heater) area. If you must blow dry them, use warm air and be careful about holding the dryer too close to the bird. Heat can cause feathers to look unnatural.

Small tight feathered birds dry somewhat quickly whereas large heavy feathered birds can take up to 36 hours to completely dry. Make sure your birds are completely dry before you take them to a show. Wet birds cannot win.

Your birds are almost “show ready”. Transporting them to the show and your last-minute touch up grooming is all you have to do once you reach the show.

Transporting them in clean carriers with the least amount of contact with other birds or wire is best. Wire is not a friend of feathers. Carriers that are specially made to transport animals with 2 inches of plain pine shavings (not cedar, sand or newspaper) for absorbency make excellent transport containers. If the birds are housed together, they may be transported together without fighting.

Most of the time the maximum number of birds per carrier is 2.

Never put birds together that have not been housed together because they generally will fight while in route to the show.

Upon your arrival, find your coops and place your bird inside. If judging is that day, fill the water cup only until after judging. If judging is another day, be sure to feed and water. It’s a good idea to take a container of your own feed and a gallon jug of water. It’ll save time searching for a bag of feed if the show provides it and usually water faucets are on the outside of the building. So, save your tired feet some walking and work.

Find out when the show starts and do your last-minute grooming before the judge arrives. If judging starts at 9:00 AM then have the last-minute grooming done before that time. Leave the aisle.

You are now finished.....Enjoy this time of visiting while the judge takes over and does all the work.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Available on the YEPA website is a booklet that is a complete review on bathing & grooming, including how to trim the beak and toenails, how to wash white birds and how to wash dark birds, how to wash soft feathered breeds and hard feathered breeds. Equipment you will need on hand and an excerpt on how to cage train your birds for cages in the showroom.

[www.youthexhibitionpoultry.org](http://www.youthexhibitionpoultry.org) (store). This is a great book for your poultry library!

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