



University of Idaho  
College of Agriculture  
Cooperative Extension Service  
Agricultural Experiment Station

**LIBRARY**

NOV 3 1978

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

# Fitting, Grooming and Feeding for Show

LaMont Smith, *Extension Dairy Specialist, District IV*

To prepare a well-fitted animal for show requires time and hard work. Experience will teach you many rights and wrongs, but even the experienced fitter needs time to make the animal look her best for the show. Getting the animal out of the hot sun, away from tormenting flies and into a barn or shed is first on the fitter's list. This should be done about 6 weeks before the show. While the animal is penned up, you can apply fly spray lightly but do not overdo it. Fly spray can make the hair coarser and cause dirt and dust to stick to the hair coat.

If you select one time to wash an animal, 6 weeks before show day is the time. Get her clean and then keep her clean. A second washing may be needed about 2 days before the show, but do not wash an animal too often. Washing removes the natural hair oils and makes the hair look loose and fuzzy — just the opposite of what you want.

Early washing will be a big help in removing the dead, dull, sun-bleached hair coat. It stimulates new hair growth, loosens old hair and helps the blanket do the job.

Use a bar of mild soap for washing. Detergents may be irritating to the animal's skin. Use plenty of water to wet the animal thoroughly, then work up a good lather using the soap and a stiff brush. Work the suds into the hair and rub the hide vigorously. Don't miss a spot. Rinse all the soap away with a hose and water, being careful not to get water in the animal's ears. After rinsing, use the flat of your hand to smooth the hair coat and, at the same time, to remove excess water.

Don't wash the inside of the animal's ear with soap and water. Use a clean cloth, dampen it with rubbing alcohol and wipe the oil, wax and dirt from the ear. Clean the feet with a stiff brush or wire brush and water. You can use colorless fingernail polish or colorless furniture polish to shine light-colored hoofs. On black hoofs, use black shoe polish.

Blanket the animal 6 weeks before the show with a clean blanket. Smooth the hair before putting on

the blanket. The blanket should fit properly, covering the animal from the tailhead to the neck. Be sure it covers the withers. It should be long enough to cover the flank and extend below the belly line.

Blanketing will protect your animal from dust, dirt and flies and will help keep the hair smooth. The warmth of the blanket will help loosen dead, dull hair and bring out the natural oils in the skin.

Keep the animal and the blanket clean by proper bedding. Remove droppings as often as possible. If the animal becomes stained from manure or dirty bedding, washing the stained spots with water containing some bleach will be helpful.

Curry, brush and rub down the animal each day. Use a rubber curry comb and work it in a vigorous, circular motion to loosen the hair and hide. Never use a steel curry comb since it doesn't loosen the hair as well as rubber and will cut and break the ends off new hair, making them stiff and bristle-like.

After hair has been loosened, take a stiff, long-bristled brush and, with quick, flicking action of the wrist, remove the hair and dust from the animal. Follow this procedure with a good rubdown, using the palm of your hands. This method helps to keep hair in place, and, at the same time, removes excess, loose hairs. This is the best method to bring out the natural oils and add gloss to the animal's hair coat.

Don't comb the switch during the early grooming period. You want to keep all the long hairs intact in the switch, and combing will pull hair out. Several washings before show day should be enough to clean the switch. If stains are present, bleaching may help remove them. To make the switch fluffy and curly, braid it a few hours before show time, then brush out the braids just before going to the show ring.

Do not overfeed the animal. Always avoid over-conditioning since judges look unfavorably upon fat animals. However, a good growthy animal is necessary.

Clip the head, ears inside and out, neck and tails of calves and yearling heifers a day or two before the

show to make them look neat and trim. Do not clip the underline on heifers as it tends to make them look shallow-bodied. However, on milk cows, clip the entire udder, milk veins and underline to the navel. You are permitted to clip an animal's entire body if she has long and dry hair. However, this should be done about 6 weeks to 2 months before show time to give the hair a chance to grow out long enough to lay down and take on a glossy finish in the fitting process.

For some breeds such as Milking Shorthorns, clip the tail and blend in the tailhead. Clip the udder and milk veins on animals that have freshened. Don't clip shoulders, neck or face but be sure to groom these areas neatly and train hair to lay smooth and neat.

Watch animals closely to be sure their toes do not become excessively long. Trim and shape the feet at

least 2 weeks before show date. This allows the heifer or cow time to recover if the foot becomes tender from trimming too closely.

Before you enter the ring on show day, make a final check. If your animal's hair is quite dry, mix a little mineral oil and alcohol half and half. With a rag, put the mixture lightly just on the black spots or area of the animal. Rub it in with the palms of your hands. Do this soon enough that you can rub it in and it does not leave a greasy appearance. You should also brush the dust off the top of the neck and behind the poll. That final brushing before entering the ring puts the hair in place. You may use a very light application of fly spray on the legs and belly. Be careful not to overapply because dust will stick to the fly spray. Now the animal should be ready. Be sure your appearance is as good as your animal.

## Training and Showing

Training an animal for the show ring takes a lot of time and patience. However, once trained, an animal never forgets. Get started early and train her correctly. Breaking a calf to a halter at 3 or 4 months of age is not too early.

For early training, use a rope halter. It should fit correctly with the nose piece bridging the face about midway between the eyes and the nose. The best way to teach an animal to lead is to tie her to a stall for a few days. However, a person should watch closely the first few hours so the calf cannot get twisted up in the halter and strangle herself.

When training begins, always walk backwards on the left side of the animal with the lead strap in the left hand. Always make your animal walk slowly. Stand your animal with her head up, front feet squarely placed, topline straight and one hind foot slightly ahead of the other.

There is no absolute rule for posing all animals. Keep the topline straight and the head held high enough to keep the animal alert and natural looking. If at all possible, set her up so her front feet are slightly uphill. Remember, you are trying to show the animal so you will cover her weaknesses and show off her strong points. To do this, you must know the animal's strengths and weaknesses.

Enter the show ring leading the animal with the left hand. Walk backwards, moving the animal very slowly so that her best form is shown. Leading in a clockwise direction allows you to watch the judge and your animal.

If ring space permits, leave a short distance between your animal and the one ahead. This allows handling more to your choosing, particularly when posing her for the judge. When the judge asks that the animals be lined up, react promptly. If possible,

select a slightly higher spot for your animal's front feet, but keep her in line with the others. If you must move your animal out of line for repositioning because the judge has changed her place in the lineup, take her the way that will take least time and cause the least interference. If you are near the end of the line, leading her around that end and back into position will probably be best. If positioned in the middle of a fairly large class, lead her ahead then cut a figure eight back through the opening to get into line. Do not turn too short since longer turns will give the animal a more natural appearance.

When the judge passes along the line of animals, gently and slowly position yourself so he can see both the head and front end of your animal. Do not move further than directly in front of your animal. Always be prepared to give your animal's birthdate, last freshening date and due date in case the judge asks.

After the judge puts you into a specific place in the lineup, continue showing the animal. You may lose your spot if the animal goes to sleep. An experienced showman starts showing his animal the moment he enters the ring and doesn't stop until after the animal has been placed and is out of the ring on its way to the barn. In close placing for champion showmen, the judge may ask you to lead your competitor's animal. Know your competition and observe closely the handling of the other animals. This may help you win the close ones.

Dress for the show. White clothes are not imperative, but they are desirable. Clean clothes and clean shoes are a must. Dirty clothes, no matter what color, and unusual clothing always detract from the showman. Be considerate of your fellow showmen. The best rule to follow is to be as well-groomed and well-mannered as you would expect other showmen to be.