

## Grooming 101 Degreasing Demystified *by Sue Dalangin*

A greasy coat is a heavy coat, lacking body, movement and volume. We all want our cats to look their best, and the first step to most bathing routines is degreasing. Grease is an oily or fatty substance, its primary purpose is to hydrate and lubricate the skin. In some animals, it also provides a water proofing layer or insulation. Some cats produce more than others, and combined with a fine, cottony coat, grease can wreck havoc on your show cat. But some oil is necessary for healthy skin, and too much degreasing will strip and dry your cat's coat, leaving it brittle and dull.

Did you know that oil dissolves oil? This may seem to be an odd contradiction, but it's true. Oil can bind with dirt and impurities and cause blocked or plugged ducts within the skin, leading to an over production of oil as the body attempts to cleanse the pores. A good example of this is stud tail. It may be no more than some waxy brown or black flecks that are difficult to remove from the fur, or it may lead to a skin infection, like severe acne. Stripping oil from the surface of the skin but not truly cleansing the pores can also lead to an over production of oil. But once the pores are cleared properly and clarified, the skin returns to a natural balance of moderate oil production. You may be surprised to learn that the active ingredient in the most popular Persian degreaser is lanolin, which is the fatty, waxy oil extract from lamb's wool!

Let's explore some of our options

Goop is by far and away the most commonly used degreaser. It's very effective, gentle, and inexpensive. There are a few formulations, including the familiar tub canister, a larger canister that fits in a dispenser, and even a groomer's formula. There are other varieties containing pumice that are not suitable for cat grooming, so we will focus on these three.

The small canister has a thick, creamy consistency, and is easy to scoop in large quantities to apply directly to the coat. In my experience, this works best when you want to apply Goop to a dry coat, as it gives you good

control right out of the tub.

The larger canister, made for use in a dispenser, has a thinner consistency and works well when heated and poured into a condiment or hairdresser's bottle. This works well for controlled spot treatments, when you want to get it right on the roots.

Then there is Groomer's Goop, formulated especially for grooming animals. The manufacturer says it will remove gum, tar, chewing gum, and even skunk spray from your cat's coat. I hope I never have to test any of these claims on my himmies! Groomer's Goop is made of Lanolin, Glycerin, Vitamin E, and Aloe Vera. Of the three, this is my least favorite, but you should try them for yourself and see what works for you. It does come in a nice little squeeze bottle, which is very travel friendly.



A little off topic, but Goop works well on greasy stains in clothing, and it's wonderful for cleaning your greasy car mats;-)

Another gentle degreaser is corn starch or dry shampoo powder. This takes time, so advance planning is necessary. You want to line comb the coat, applying powder right to the roots in small sections, generously packing the roots with powder. It needs to be on the coat for at least an hour, I prefer to do it the night before a morning bath. The powder will absorb the excess oils, even drawing some from the pores, but it does not strip or dehydrate the skin. For a really studly male, a powder packed coat followed by Goop the next day can do wonders!

Various dish soaps are known for their claims of "getting grease out of your way," while still maintaining a "gentle to the hands" effect. The most popular choices are Dawn and Ivory. On very greasy cats, you may need to powder, Goop, and then Dawn. As you can imagine, this is very stripping to the coat and the skin, but it will remove every last trace of grease. Dawn may be too drying to use on certain colors, and I have friends who show white Persians who will only use white or clear products on their cats, and prefer Ivory. On a black or blue, it may strip the coat too much and leave it



dry and dull, lacking the luster and shine of a healthy coat. On a cotton coat, this effect can be much worse. If you do use Dawn, use the original or ultra concentrated formulas (diluted.) Do not use the over-night soak enzyme formula, it does not rinse cleanly from the coat. There is a product line that is clear called Dawn Pure Essentials, which may contain essential oils for scent and should be avoided.

Orvus W A Paste is an industrial product made of sodium lauryl sulfate. Sodium lauryl sulfate is a surfactant, detergent and emulsifier used in thousands of cosmetic products, as well as in industrial cleaners. It is present in nearly all shampoos, scalp treatments, hair color and bleaching agents, toothpastes, body washes and cleansers, make-up foundations, liquid hand soaps, laundry detergents and bath oils/bath salts. It is a caustic detergent useful for removing grease; although commonly included in personal care items, it can irritate skin and should not be swallowed. SLS is what makes shampoos lather.

Davis Degreasing Shampoo is a highly concentrated cleaning agent that is a soft paste when cool and a thick ivory liquid when warm. The active ingredients are sodium laurel sulfate and lanolin, so it is almost a hybrid of Goop and Orvus, and it has a nice citrus orange scent.



Kelco Filthy Animal is a non-soap, non-detergent shampoo made up of Aloe Vera, Cedar Oil, D'limonene, Tea Tree Oil, Eucalyptus Oil, Neem Oil, DL Panthenol, Vitamins A and E, Nettle Extract, Chamomile Extract, Comfrey Extract, Henna Extract and Rosemary Extract. As you can see, it is very different in substance than most detergents or solvents used for degreasing. This seems to lean more heavily on the “oil dissolves oil” practice.



If you're willing to spend \$150 per gallon, Les Pooch Botanique's F&T Degreaser, Dematter & Deep Cleanser may be the gold standard. A blend of twelve natural oils which, combined together, produce one the most effective multi-purpose degreasing cleanser in the world, according to the manufacturer. The all natural formula is said to be great for removing ear wax, dried food, crust from ears, chins, and whiskers. Removes tar and gum, sebaceous oil, excess ear medication, yeast buildup and stud tail.

#### A few things to consider

Putting chemicals on skin may actually be worse than eating them. When a chemical is ingested, the enzymes in saliva and the stomach help to break it down and flush it out of your body. However, when a chemical is put on your skin, it is absorbed straight into the bloodstream without filtering of any kind, going directly to the internal organs.

Once these chemicals find their way into the body, they tend to accumulate over time because typically the necessary enzymes to break them down are lacking. Be careful what you put on your kitty.

#### Proper degreasing

How do degreasers work? A degreaser is alkaline (base) and grease is acidic. Degreaser neutralize the ph of the grease, causing it to fall apart (dissociate or “dissolve”) and rinse away more easily.

The key is to saturate dry hair with the solution you choose before you wet the hair. Once you wet the hair, you have lost the battle. It will become almost impossible to get all of the grease out of the coat because the fur will absorb the water, and the water will act as a barrier, preventing the degreasing solution from attaching to the oil in the hair.

Even if your cat is a very greasy, it is important to condition after degreasing to prevent damage from over drying. If your cat produces excessive oil naturally, degreasing without conditioning will trigger a signal to create more oil, and your cat will be excessively greasy very quickly. It sounds contradictory, but proper conditioning will reduce the over production of oil.