

PRODUCTS: HOW DO YOU CHOOSE?

The age-old quandary in the grooming industry is which products to choose. Do I pick based on ingredients and take into consideration if they are all natural, holistic, organic? Do I choose based on fragrance or is price the deciding factor? Can I just cleanse with shampoo, or do I need to condition? The options are endless, so how should we select our products?

With so many choices in the industry, it is imperative that we start with a plan. The first question you should always ask yourself is what the ultimate goal. Is the decisive factor financial, is it product fragrance, visual presentation, or is it the health and well-being of the skin and coat? As a veterinarian this is a simple question to answer. I want to keep the skin and hair healthy for the pet as it eliminates prolonged suffering, decreases costs to the owner, and makes for an easier groom in the future.

If the pet is the main focus, we can scratch off the products that are great for cleaning but are very harsh to the pet as well as the groomer/bather's hands. This also eliminates the use of dish soaps and many products that are not designed for animals, contrary to what others may suggest. The best way to determine harshness is by applying the product on your own hands. If you are using good, quality products, your hands will be better at the end of the day than when you started. Anything less and you may need to rethink your choice of products!

Many of these cheaper products are enticing to groomers and salon owners because they are inexpensive (perceived to be) or have high dilution factors, which leads us to believe that we can save money. This is often a façade, because we must use more of the product and will most likely have to bathe the pet numerous times for a clean result. I can take a more expensive product and bathe a 30 lb. short haired dog in 1 tsp (5 ml) of product (whole horse with 3-4 TBLS of product). If you compare the actual price per bath, a more expensive product (cost per bottle) may actually save you money in the long run. Remember also, you can rarely buy quality for cheap, but you can buy cheap for an inflated price. Anything less and you may need to rethink your choice of products!

One of the more difficult parts of selecting products is weeding out what is marketing and what is actual science. So, let's breakdown a few of those terms:

ALL NATURAL: What is the definition? The reality is that there is no legal definition, so it leaves it up to companies to use it in any way they choose. A loose definition is that it was derived from nature at one time. Look around the room you are in and name one thing that would not qualify for "all natural".

ORGANIC- Derived from living matter. Even the detergents in shampoo were derived from the coconut oil BUT modified in the lab.

HOLISTIC: This term is most used in the medical field to take a whole-body approach to disease which includes mind, body, and soul. I have yet to find a shampoo or conditioner that I feel helps the mind and soul. I suppose it is good for the mind if our pets no longer itch! Needless to say, this is more of a marketing ploy than well defined.

HYPO-ALLERGENIC: Our pets can be allergic to anything. Allergies are very individual. So, what would qualify as hypo-allergenic? There is no standard in the industry, so it can be whatever a company cares to make it. Marketing!

PRESERVATIVE FREE: Really? What do you think the shelf life would be if there were NO preservatives in the product?

This type of propaganda has reached the point of brain washing us to believe it that it has scientific support. We need to think things through and research some of these marketing “buzz words” to see what they actually mean. When in doubt, just ask the company their definition of these buzz words and ask what the criteria is, to meet that classification. It does not mean that these products are bad, just do not let these marketing terms be your driving force in buying these products.

You might ask, “should I look at the ingredients then?” Unless you have a chemistry degree and can obtain the proportions of the ingredients (proprietary info from the company) it is impossible to gain much from ingredients. Many of our plant-based medicines can save lives in low quantities and can kill you in large quantities, so if you do not know how much is in a product how would you know what is safe? Shockingly, ingredient lists are not even required for pet grooming products.

THINK ABOUT THIS SCENARIO:

TWO INGREDIENTS: hydrogen and oxygen

TWO CHEMICAL REACTIONS: $2H_2 + O_2 = 2H_2O$ (water)

$2H_2O + O_2 = 2H_2O_2$ (hydrogen peroxide)

SAME INGREDIENTS DIFFERENT RESULTS:

Drink 8 oz of both and see how similar the results of the two products are,

with the same ingredients!!!!

What about conditioners? Like shampoos, not all conditioners are created equal. Conditioners play an especially vital role in the health and well-being of the skin and hair. Basic science tells

us that shampoos strip and conditioners add back. If you only use shampoo, then you are setting the pet up for skin issues. Essentially you are removing nutrients, oils, and hydration that are critical for the health of the skin barrier and the hair.

Even after discussing the details of product selection, we have really only narrowed down the playing field. There are still a ton of products out there. There are several products that have different functions. We all have our favorites, but the lingering question is, "Is there something better out there?". You can find your answer by eliminating the obvious lesser quality products, consulting people that you respect for advice, and trying out different products until one is found that meets the desired criteria. A wonderful way to observe the results of products is to examine the skin and feel the coats of cats and dogs that have been bathed in different products. Ask about ongoing skin issues. You can do this at various shows or even in your neighborhood. The bottom line is how it affects your pet's hair and skin and of course, how it affects your own skin. We cannot ask our pets how they feel, so our hands are one of the best evaluations of the product. At the end of the day, products are just tools. It is extremely important that we know the science, use good technique, AND use the right product for the given situation.