

# Skin Care 101: Preparing for a “Water Only” Show

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## Introduction

Many shows across the country today are “water only” shows, meaning that no foreign substances, such as oils or powders, can be used to dress the skin and hair on show day. Most packers have demanded this practice to prevent oils and other foreign substances from entering packing plants and to make the dehairing process easier. Other shows have implemented this rule to level the playing field for all exhibitors and make the hogs appear more natural in the showring. However, that does not mean that there is not some “homework” involved in making your pig look its best. Skin and hair conditioning take time and effort and should start at least a month prior to entering the showring.

## Objective

- To provide youth swine exhibitors with step-by-step instructions for preparing the skin and hair of show pigs for show.

## Approximately one month prior to show:

- Brush, brush, brush! There is nothing better, and no substitute for daily brushing. This not only stimulates the natural oils produced by the hair follicles, but it gets the animal used to being worked with, and encourages the youth exhibitor spend time with his/her project.
- Wash pigs once a week. Pigs are creatures of habit, and need to be exposed to a variety of situations prior to the show. Washing weekly not only prevents build-up of any other products that you may be using on the skin and hair, but allows the pig to get used to being washed and handled.
  - Shampoo: There are a variety of products that work well on pigs. There are specific livestock shampoos, some even for white pigs. Many exhibitors also use human shampoos or mild dish soap. Some shampoos are deeper-cleaning and may tend to dry out the skin, especially on white hogs.
- Use skin conditioners at least three times a week. There are many different types of conditioners available, ranging from oils to foam conditioners. Some of these conditioners even contain a bit of alcohol, which can affect some hogs (especially white hogs), drying the skin instead of conditioning it.
  - If you are showing in the summer, or in the South during most of the year, be extremely careful when using conditioners, especially on white hogs. White pigs sunburn very easily and tend to dry out much easier than dark colored hogs. Personal

experience: if using any type of oil, including baby oil, on white hogs, apply liberally at night and wash the next morning to prevent sunburn, since these pigs can burn even from reflective light. Regardless of skin color, oiling the skin and allowing the animal exposure to direct sunlight is not a good idea, especially in warm weather.

- Different products may work better on some pigs than others. Skin color, skin thickness, amount of exposure to sunlight, temperature, bedding, and overall combination of these effects make each pig react differently to different products. Starting far enough ahead of the show date will allow you to find the right conditioner and routine for each pig.

#### One week prior to show:

- More brushing! It is more important than ever to put some effort into it and brush each hog every day. Some thinner-skinned (once again, white) hogs may require a softer-bristled brush than others.
- Use skin conditioners every day, once again, being careful of sunburn. If you decide to clip your pig, you should wait a day before applying conditioners to prevent irritation. Be sure to read the show rules regarding clipping, including minimum hair length.
- Wash as needed, especially just prior to loading to come to the show.

#### Show day:

- If the rules state “water only”, take it very seriously. This means *no* foreign substances are allowed from here on out. Wash your pig (in the wash rack or with waterless shampoo in the pen) just prior to the show to remove any substances that may be on the skin.
- If you have done your homework ahead of time, you have stimulated the natural oils in the skin and hair follicles, and your pig will shine, even after bathing. When you mist your pig with water, it should “bead up”, but should not feel oily to the touch.

