

A pig is shown in a show ring, standing on a wooden floor. The background is a warm, golden-yellow color with many bokeh light effects and starbursts. The pig is the central focus, and the overall atmosphere is bright and celebratory.

Sparkle and Shine

HOW TO GET YOUR PIG'S HAIR AND SKIN IN SHOW-READY CONDITION

by AMANDA SOLLMAN

There are a lot of things every hog showman must do before entering the show ring. Feeding, watering, practicing showmanship, making sure you have the right outfit on, pinning on your name tag, grabbing a pocket brush – and so on and so forth.

One thing everyone should remember, though, is that caring for your pigs' skin and hair could make a big difference. It can leave a strong first impression on the judge, and that preparation must start long before the truck and trailer hit the road.

the first look

Imagine yourself about to enter the show ring. You have trained your pig to walk the perfect path out of the gate, so the judge can get the best first look possible. You have this one in the bag. Now, imagine your pig spent a little too much time practicing that amazing walk and got a sunburn in the process. Your first look may be in trouble.

“Some common mistakes young showmen make, in terms of skin and hair care – particularly with white hogs, would be that they come into the ring with some sort of a rash or a burn. Right away, I think that really detracts from the animals,” says Brian Arnold, Lafayette, Ill. Arnold teaches and is the assistant livestock judging coach at Black Hawk College – East Campus in Kewanee, Ill. He has judged hog shows all across the country.

“Skin and hair preparation, just like showmanship, starts at home,” he says. “Making sure you have healthy skin and hair is something that needs to be done early, rather than trying to do it all on show day.”

One of the first things Arnold recommends is something that any showman, no matter their budget, can afford.

“A clean pen is probably one of the most important things,” he says. “Clean, dry bedding will help prevent stains on white hogs.”

Arnold recommends cleaning pens daily, putting down dry bedding every time you clean and double-checking that no water nipples, buckets or hoses are leaking.

After a clean pen, he recommends developing a routine to improve skin and

hair quality. That routine should include brushing animals, washing pigs two to three times a week and always using a conditioner, whether it is done nightly or after every washing. These steps will ensure that you get rid of any dry skin that may cause your pigs to itch, as well as softening and training the hair to fall in just the right way.

“The earlier you can get started working on that – brushing, washing, and conditioning the skin and hair – the better,” Arnold says.

Mr. Golden Sun

It is no mystery that showpigs spend a lot of time outside during the summer months, whether for walking or washing, in order to get ready for the large number of hog shows and county fairs that happen during that time. While walking your pigs is an extremely important part of showpig preparation, being out in the sun for long periods of time can cause harm to their skin and hair, if not handled properly.

For white or lighter-skinned hogs, keeping sun exposure to a minimum is important.

“If you have white hogs, avoid them being directly in the sun too much, just like a light or fair-skinned person,” Arnold says. “Too much sunlight is obviously going to give them a chance at a sunburn.”

There are several ways to prevent sunburn. Consider walking pigs in the morning or later in the evening, when the sun’s rays are not quite as direct. When they are in their pens, provide some cover or opportunity for shade. And do not use any skin products that have too much oil in them, as that will increase the risk of burning.

In the event that your pigs do get burned, though, it is important to take immediate action. Like with people, sunburns dry out your pigs’ skin. This will cause them to itch and want to rub against anything in their pen, which only makes the burn worse. Arnold recommends using a conditioner with aloe to soothe and moisturize the burn, in addition to brushing them to remove any dry, flaky skin.

Not every pig needs to be shaded from the sun, however. Breeds that have darker skin – Hampshires, Durocs, Spots – could actually benefit from a little sun exposure.

“It’s important that those hogs get some sunlight to where they can start to darken up,” Arnold says. “I think that really helps out in making sure they look their best on show day.”

Because of the wide array of differences between breeds, it is important to evaluate your pigs early on, and identify what steps should be taken to prevent sunburn or darken them up. Planning ahead will save you a lot of time later on and will help you ensure that first look is a good one.

find what works

It’s not just judges that understand the importance of hair and skin care. Veteran Texas agriculture teacher Stu Dildine, Bullard, Texas, has been involved in livestock exhibition for years and understands that every little bit helps in the show ring.

“Showing pigs is kind of like a beauty contest,” Dildine explains. “When you go to the beauty contest, all the girls are going to look perfect. It’s the same thing with a hog show. We want them to look their best, and taking care of their hair and skin does that.”

Making sure your pigs’ skin and hair is top notch is just one part of the puzzle that can take you to the top of your class or show. Courtnee Odom and Reagan Kelly, both of Bullard, Texas, used a combination of Dildine’s Daily Advantage, Dildine’s Refresh and Champion’s Choice to give “that little extra.”



Recognizing the value of quality skin and hair and building upon years of experience, Dildine created two feed additives that he believes give showpigs just a little something extra. His protein-based additive, Daily Refresh, helps grow thicker hair and healthier skin, while his other product, Refresh, is full of electrolytes, which keep pigs (and their skin) hydrated.

“You need to do what you have to do in order to keep your pigs looking nice,” Dildine says. “Refresh and Daily Advantage are what we believe in, but there’s lots of products out there.”

And a truer statement has never been said. So many products are available, it can be difficult for showmen to make a decision about which one is the best. Some products cost more and some cost less. Some are a conditioner only, and some add a little sheen to the hair. Which is the best? According to Arnold, many good products are available, no matter your budget.

“In terms of products, a showman really needs to find a hair and skin conditioner they can use a couple of times a week at home,” he explains. “If they can use a conditioner –

maybe one with aloe – especially after they use any type of soap, it will help the skin not to dry out too much.”

Some showmen use products like Revive and Sudden Impact, both manufactured and sold by Sullivan Supplies, which are designed to condition and moisturize hair and skin, while adding a bit of shine. Dildine stands by Champions Choice, a hair and skin conditioner that includes citronella.

“The citronella helps keep away the flies and mosquitos,” he explains. “We use it on both white and black pigs to keep the skin moist, but it also does a great job at darkening up black hogs, especially when they have been raised indoors.”

Don’t think that you have to go with a name-brand product, however. Other products can be used to achieve positive results that are cost effective.

“We used something as simple as mane and tail conditioner on our pigs back when we were showing heavily,” Arnold says. “I think the No. 1 thing is to find something that works and stick with it.”

preparation before success

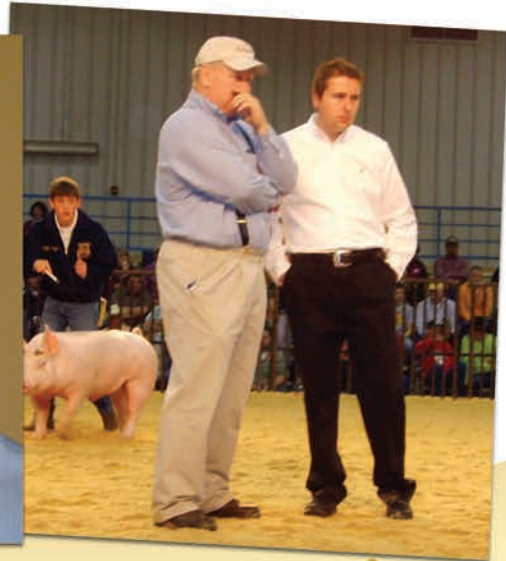
No matter who you talk to, any seasoned livestock showman understands that success in the ring comes from preparation at home. Whether you are practicing showmanship or washing your hog, taking time to practice before a show is necessary if you have any interest in winning.

“My biggest advice to anybody would be that, no matter if you’re showing in your backyard or at the national type show in Louisville, it’s always going to be competitive. There’s always someone who wants to win,” Dildine says. “Always be prepared. This is no different than athletics. If you’re going to be successful, you’ve got to practice every day and perform every day to get better.”

Arnold agrees, especially when it comes to fitting your animal.

“In order to reach that barrow or gilt’s full potential, you need to make sure you make a full effort at home to start taking care of your pigs’ skin and hair,” Arnold stresses. “That’s the No. 1 piece of advice I would give.”

Brian Arnold, Lafayette, Ill., has judged hog shows all over the country. His biggest advice to showmen, regarding hair and skin care, is to take the time at home to prepare your pigs instead of waiting until show day. Arnold says every showman should find a conditioner that will moisturize your pigs’ skin and help soften their hair.



TOP 5 TIPS from the judge

When your goal is to be on top, every little detail is important. Here are a few quick tips from veteran hog show judge Brian Arnold, Lafayette, Ill., to ensure your pigs’ skin and hair is show ring ready.

- 1. Keep your pens clean.** A clean, dry environment will prevent stains on white and light-skinned hogs.
- 2. Wash two to three times a week.** Weekly washing will keep skin and hair from getting dingy.
- 3. Always condition.** Using a conditioner with aloe after every wash will prevent soap build-up and keep your pigs’ skin from drying. Remember, though, it is not about the name on the bottle — find something that works for you and your budget.
- 4. Keep white pigs out of the sun as much as possible.** Sunburns redden and dry the skin, which isn’t quick to fix. Make sure white pigs have access to shade and walk early in the morning or in the evening when the sun is less direct.
- 5. Quit bugging me!** Bug bites are not attractive or comfortable for your pigs. Use fly strips or spray around pigs, and make sure there is a breeze through the pens to keep flies and other insects to a minimum.

Watch the clippers!

Both Stu Dildine, Bullard, Texas, and Brian Arnold, Lafayette, Ill., say a common mistake among showmen is to clip pigs too tightly or in a way that doesn’t blend smoothly. Even if you have taken all care possible to condition and moisturize your pigs’ skin and hair, a poor clip job can ruin a good first impression.

“Clipping can really be problematic if you don’t let it come across as natural,” Arnold says. “Anything that looks like it’s not natural really takes away from the appearance of those hogs.”

Both men encourage showmen to not clip pigs too tightly and, if you are unsure about how to properly clip, work with an experienced showman or adult to learn.