

# USING A RECIRCULATING PET BATHING SYSTEM



## FAQ

by BBird - A Bathing System User

### ***How does a recirculating system work?***

Basically, the system consists of a self-contained submersible pump, a flexible hose and a spray nozzle with an adjustment valve so you can reduce the pressure for faces or puppies. A very important feature of a good system is an electrical system with GFCI capacity, to prevent shock around water. Most systems also come with an air button that can be used at the tub for on/off function with your foot or knee or can be placed for hand or elbow use.

### ***How are these systems used?***

The tub drain is plugged. Water is drawn into the tub, shampoo or conditioner added, and the product is mixed in the tub (takes 3 seconds) and then the solution is forced through the coat by the pump over and over until the pet is cleaned. This usually takes from one to

five minutes and then the tub is drained and the animal is rinsed with fresh water.

How much water is needed depends on your tub. You need enough water to cover the bottom of your pump. If the pump is growling, it is getting too much air and not enough water. A tub that is tilted and has a lower side works on less total water than a flat bottom. For most bathing, you probably will be using 1.5-2.5 gallons of water and 1/2 to one ounce of shampoo.

***What are the advantages of a recirculating bathing system?***

1. *Efficiency* - In one step, the recirculating system is doing 3 and 3/4 steps of the hand wash: pre-wetting, applying product, working product through the coat, and 3/4 of the rinse.

2. *Saves Product* - Many animals can be bathed used only 1/2 ounce of shampoo product and an ounce or two of conditioner. Instead of applying more and more product as you bath a dirty dog, you are applying the product over and over, getting maximum cleaning from your products. Even if a filthy dog requires a second bath, you have still saved product.

3. *Saves Water* - The old admonition to "rinse rinse rinse" is history with the recirculating system. Most of the rinsing is done in the bath "cycle" leaving only about 1/4 of the rinsing to be done in the final rinse. This not only saves water, but saves hot water especially. The recirculating system is a great addition to a mobile unit.

4. *Saving Time* - Precious minutes of tub time are saved with each bath. Since dogs (and cats) are out of the tub quicker, there is less time for them to react and become distressed. Less time, less struggle, less stress. I'm for that!

5. *No sudden temperature fluctuations* - The recirculating system does not suffer from sudden heat spurges or going cold like the water from

the tap might. Although the bath water may cool off some, most baths are accomplished with consistent skin-friendly lukewarm water temperature.

6. *Less chance of shampoo irritation or allergic reactions* - Because of the higher dilution of products through the bathing system and the greatly reduced duration of contact with the animal's skin, there is a significant reduction in the possibility of undesirable reactions to products.

7. *Less rubbing is better for the hair* - Hair care experts explicitly state that just about everything we do that is rubbing hair together causes some damage to the hair cuticle and increases the chance of tangling and snagging the hair. In this important respect, there is no difference between pet and human hair. The mechanical cleaning action of the recirculating bathing system is cosmetically perfect for taking optimal care of the hair.

***Will my existing products work with a bathing system?***

Most likely your favorite products can be used in your new system. Shampoos that are made especially for recirculating systems are, however, more concentrated than some products so that they will hold up with the extreme dilutions of the bathing system, and they are made with less foam building ingredients. Persons who formulate and manufacture our shampoos are used to providing a LOT of suds and thick suds can impede the action of the shampoo solution in a pump system. The pump can't pump as much solution when the foam is clogging the screen. The result is that the pump works harder and not as much volume of product is pumped through. Lower sudsing products work most efficiently through a system. The rule of thumb is to use less product than you would think. Rarely should you have to use more than 1 ounce of product for one or two gallons of bath water. If you don't like the results, cut back on shampoo rather than add more. It is a good idea to start out using something that has been formulated for a

bathing system or that other groomers who use your system recommend.

***Aren't I just getting the pet dirty again by recirculating the dirty bath water back on the hair?***

NO! This is the most common misconception about recirculating bathing. The chemical nature of soaps and detergents is that they contain surfactant molecules which attach and surround particles of dirt and oils and hold them in suspension in the solution. This is true of shampoo, dish soap, laundry detergent, and personal care products. The recirculating bathing system works on principles similar to your washing machine. Now if we could only add the spin cycle! Just kidding. Your clothes don't suffer from being jostled around in the dirty wash water because the dirt is held in the solution and not redeposited onto the clothing fibers. The same holds true of the bathing solution and the pump. The pressure of the pump and the pattern of the spray nozzle replaces the agitation cycle of the washing machine.

***What if there are feces present, does the bath become a cesspool of bacteria?***

First of all, if the dog or cat urinates or defecates in the bath, you should dump the solution and start over. The bacteria contained in the normal bathing process are kept in solution and killed by the shampoo surfactants. All soaps and detergents are somewhat antibacterial. This is why we wash our hands after going to the bathroom. The idea that you are spreading bacteria all over the dog with the recirculating system is a vicious myth and totally untrue. Common sense dictates, however, that you would not bathe a filthy rear end and then wash the dog's face. Save the worst for last and then drain the tub and rinse.

***How can I tell if the pet is clean?***

Your senses of sight, smell, and feel work to tell you when a dog is not clean in the bathing system as they work with hand bathing. You still want to feel the coat to see if it feels gritty, you just don't need to

knead the product through the coat as with hand bathing. You still want to look for discoloration and signs of lingering dirt, and if the dog still smells dirty, it is. Some particularly dirty dogs need two baths, even with a bathing system. If the suds start breaking down in your bath solution and the color becomes very dark, you may have reached the saturation point of that solution. It's time to drain the tub and draw a second bath.

It takes a little time to get used to using a bathing system to get the very best results possible. It is possible for people who are resistant to change to not make the necessary adjustments for optimum results from the bathing system. As with just about everything we do in grooming, the bathing system works best when used carefully and systematically, moving the nozzle methodically over each part of the dog. In the beginning, it can seem to take as much time as hand bathing, but as you become more methodical and systematic, great speed can be achieved.

***I'm only bathing 5 or 6 dogs a day, is a bathing system worth it?***

A recirculating system is of value to all groomers, whether you are bathing two or twenty two dogs. The recirculating system is not only more efficient, but it is more effective, delivering product to each and every hair in a diluted solution with water pressure to help work the dirt out and deliver conditioner like you never thought possible. There is much less likelihood of shampoo reactions and you are loosening old undercoat and working out some tangling right in the tub.

Here is another point: The preservative ingredients in shampoos that prevent the contamination of the product from fungus, bacteria, and microbes, lose effectiveness with dilution. As soon as you mix shampoo in mixing bottles, you are losing the protection to some degree. If those mixed products sit around longer than a day, you are risking contamination. With a recirculating system, you are mixing product fresh from the manufacturer's bottle to your tub. Fresh product,

fresh water, it's a fresh bath for every pet!

***Does the bathing system work for conditioning?***

The recirculating bathing system is a fabulous delivery system for conditioners. The hand bathing method of conditioning usually involves either working concentrated product through the coat by hand and rinsing forever, or mixing a few ounces of product in a pitcher and pouring it on the coat, working it through, and rinsing forever. With these methods you are using a lot of conditioner and you can either over condition some places and/or miss other places. The recirculating system delivers product in and around each and every hair.

There are two ways to condition with a pump system: 1) draw a fresh bath and use 1-2 ounces of conditioner and recirculate through the coat covering each and every hair with just enough conditioner, or 2) work a little concentrated product into the problem areas and then recirculate through those areas and the whole coat.

***How do I use medicated shampoos?***

Most medicated shampoos are not intended to be diluted. For full therapeutic effect, you need to follow the instructions on the label. However, you can complete the process by first using the bathing system to wet down the dog, applying the medicated product directly per instructions, wait the suggested amount of time, and then rinse the product through with the pump, before doing a fresh water final rinse.

***Do I need good water pressure for a bathing system?***

NO! A pump system can help you get much better baths if you are working with compromised water pressure. The pump provides its own pressure, and it's plenty. Very little product is left in the coat during the bath, so the final rinse is greatly reduced from that of hand bathing. If need be, you can even rinse with the pump, drawing another tub of water and running the fresh rinse through with the pump.

### ***Is cleaning the pump a hassle?***

Not really. As you bathe and/or condition, some hair may come off the dog and collect on the bottom screen of your pump. With the Bathing Beauty system, for example, this hair is released in a single clump when the pump is turned off. After you drain the tub, you simply lift the pump and scoop up the clump of hair and dispose of it. Having a small 1/2 gallon tub or bucket with a liner beside the tub makes this very easy, just dispose of the liner (plastic shopping bags work) and replace at the end of the day. In the case of heavily shedding dogs, the filter screen may become clogged during bathing. The signs of this are reduced volume coming through the nozzle or growling of the pump. Simply turn off the pump, lift it up and scoop off the collected hair.

Because the recirculating system is so effective at delivering product with water pressure, you may find more hair coming off the dogs during bathing than with hand work. This is a good thing, but you might want to have a drain cover to catch the hair before it goes into your drain. Any bath supply place has these hair catchers. That will keep you from having to dig in the drain to remove collected hair. It will also save you from plumbing problems.

Speaking of plumbing problems, you are less likely to have clogged drains when using a recirculating system because of using less conditioners. The waxes and oil ingredients used in conditioners as well as the thickeners sometimes collect hair and coat the insides of the drain pipes resulting in clogs. This is much less likely as you reduce the amount of conditioner per bath. Another reason to use that bath tub hair catcher mentioned above.

### ***What kind of maintenance is required?***

In between baths you want to keep the filter screen cleaned off. Remove clogged hair and if there is conditioner collected on the screen, rinse it off. It is a good idea to run a solution of 1 gallon water and 1 cup white vinegar through the pump at the end of the day. This will

prevent the little bit of product solution left in the pump and hose to go sour overnight. Another way to take care of that is to flush the pump backwards in the morning before the first bath. Simply remove the nozzle and run fresh water through the hose and out the bottom of the pump.

***My pump didn't turn on when I hit the button, what's wrong?***

Assuming that everything is plugged in and you have electricity, you may have a vapor lock in the pump. This happens sometimes. Sometimes it can be rectified by simply lifting and replacing the pump while running. Or, turn it off and flush the pump by removing the nozzle and running water through the hose and out the bottom of the pump. Another thing that happens sometimes is that the little air hose that runs from the on/off button to the GFCI box becomes accidentally detached. Check it out.

***Why are these systems so expensive, can't I just make my own?***

The cost of professional grooming equipment goes far beyond the cost of the parts. Considerable research and development has gone into developing these products. The head of the Hydrosurge Company once told me that it took them eight months to develop the spray pattern on the nozzle of the first Hydrosurge system. Curtis Harvey of Harvey Specialty Engineering who makes the Bathing Beauty system is very proud of the flexible hose he found for his system. Every time we buy these things, we pay for the dedication and time spent engineering and problem solving all the parts into a whole functioning and safe system. Yes you can go to the hardware and electrical supply stores and find a pond pump, a hose, a pvc pipe that you poke your own holes into, and even a GFCI box and an air hose. But the chances of your pieces fitting into a whole as perfect as the Harvey Bathing Beauty or the Hydrosurge bathing systems are slim. For every homemade success story there are countless, less celebrated, failures.



### ***What about contamination from one dog to the next?***

The recirculating bathing system is designed to be used with a fresh bath for each dog. However, a very small amount of the previous solution, either shampoo solution or conditioner solution will remain in the pump, as it is "self-priming." This amounts to two or three tablespoons of diluted product from the previous use. Under normal use this is not of concern. A few tablespoons of diluted product does not compromise the next cycle. It doesn't hurt the conditioner to have a little shampoo from the bath, nor does it hurt the next bath to have a little conditioner go into the shampoo solution when you first start the pump. The tiny bit of old solution immediately is dispersed and placed in suspension in the fresh solution.

It is good practice and common sense, however, that if you have bathed a dog with a serious skin condition, that you flush the bathing system before using it on the next animal. A cup of white vinegar in a gallon of water is a safe antibacterial cleansing solution. If you are really paranoid, you can substitute one cup of bleach for the vinegar, but if you use bleach then you should flush the system backwards by removing the nozzle and running water through the hose back out the pump so that no bleach remains in the pump. THAT can ruin your next bath, or it can rust out metal parts of the pump if left overnight.

*Barbara Bird, aka BBird, has been grooming for over 30 years. She owns Transformation Pet Center in Tucson Arizona and has been using a recirculating bathing system since 1995. Barbara writes extensively on the Internet and now has a shopping site where you can purchase a Hanvey Bathing Beauty recirculating system. <http://www.bbird.biz> will take you directly to the shopping cart. Thanks for considering the advantages of recirculating bathing and the purchase of a Bathing Beauty. If you have further questions, contact the author at [petpals@dakotacom.net](mailto:petpals@dakotacom.net).*