

The Seattle Times

Beautify your winter feet, ready for summer sandals

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Knight Ridder Newspapers

Wednesday, May 31, 2006

Thought you were the only one praying for the rain to end? What about your poor tootsies, confined to claustrophobia for the winter.

Time to bust those suckers out. Too pasty and mangled, you say?

"I wore my sandals for the first time last weekend and I was like, 'Ew,' " says Barbara Dallas.

Fear not. Whether you're a dude eager to slip into Reefs or a lady shopping for this season's peep-toe wedge, a few easy steps can prepare your feet for sunshine — and public viewing.

"A good foot inventory is the best thing to do after a winter that's been wet," says Timothy Shea, a California podiatrist.

You can make your feet look pretty. Just follow this guide:

Walking machines

Gross but true, the first thing to check for is a possible fungus infection. If you have excessive moisture on the bottom of the foot, it could be a sign, says Shea. Check your nails, too. "If they are thicker or turning yellow or discolored, fungus is a possibility," he says.

Prevent it by washing and drying your feet every day (note, shower water doesn't count). Use soap and water and a washcloth to get between your toes and dry them with a towel. Sweaty feet? Shea suggests pouring rubbing alcohol over the feet once a week to disinfect them. If the fungal problem persists, see a podiatrist about over-the-counter products such as Lamisil.

Folks with sweaty feet should replace the insoles of their shoes every six months, says Lori Weisenfeld, a New York podiatrist. She recommends Profoot's 2-ounce Miracle with memory foam that molds to the foot much like a mattress molds to the body. "It's the perfect thing for people who have bony feet," she says.



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Jeanie Phan, a nail technician and manicurist, works on a client's feet at The Nail Shop in Walnut Creek, Calif.

Scrub-a-dub

Winter breeds dry, cracked skin, particularly heels. Not exactly sexy. Once they're clean and moist, use a pumice stone or paddle to slough off excess skin that collects, due to friction when your heel hits the ground. "After about a week, the good skin will start to surface," Shea says.

It's important to moisturize on a regular basis, and not with popular body lotions. "They dry out the skin," Shea says. Scaly, dry heels should be treated with creams that contain lanolin, such as Eucerin, Nivea and Kerasal.

Now that your feet are clean and soft, you can identify corns, calluses and bursal sacks (red and inflamed bumps) atop toes and knuckles. Corn cushions and wraps that contain mineral oil work well, Weisenfeld says. You can also see your podiatrist about having more serious corns removed.

As for bunions and hammertoes, closed-toe shoes tend to worsen them. "Those problems tend to get better when you switch to open-toed shoes, because there's less pressure," Weisenfeld says.

Nail news

Oh the joy of having pretty toenails that require nothing more than a coat of clear polish. But, if, like most people, yours are a little yellow, an over-the-counter topical solution such as Nail Saver's Softener and Whitener can clear the problem. Otherwise, see your doctor for a prescription. Contrary to toenail lore, don't cut them curvy. Cut straight across to avoid in-grown toenails.

Get pedi with it

Now that your feet are healthy, you can focus on making them look great. Professional pedicures can run anywhere from \$15 to \$120, depending on where you go and what treatments you add on.

At the Nail Shop in Walnut Creek, Calif., in addition to the standard pedicure, customers can choose from a variety of extra treatments.

"It's almost like you're dealing with your face," says Nail Shop co-owner Slater Matzke, of the additional options. The shop offers \$5 extras: an alpha-hydroxy solution for calluses and feet in need of major exfoliation.

They offer extended massages (10 minutes more than the usual five minutes) and foot and leg masks that hydrate and invigorate. They finish off with a moisturizing session, for which you choose your own scent, and a lavender-scented towel wrapped around the feet.

Do it yourself

While it's nice to have someone working your kicks, it's also easy to give yourself a pedicure. Use the guide from the American Podiatric Medical Association (APMA) (www.apma.org):

- Soak your feet in a large bucket of water with a few drops of peppermint or lavender oil.

- Stimulate foot circulation by moving your thumbs from the top of your toes to the bottom of your heel and back. Use a nail clipper to cut toenails straight across. Then, use an emery board to smooth the nail edges by filing in one direction without drastically rounding the edges.
- Dip a foot file or a pumice stone into water and gently smooth the skin around the heel, and the balls and sides of your feet. For extra softening, use a scrub, such as Avon's Foot Works Double Action Sloughing Cream, and massage your entire foot and lower leg.
- Pat toes and feet dry. Loosen your foot joints by cupping your heel with one hand at the ankle and grabbing the top of your foot with the other. Apply and massage cream all over your feet to hydrate the skin. Squeeze your Achilles tendon (the fleshy area above your heel), one foot at a time, for five seconds.
- Using a cuticle oil, gently push back cuticles with a manicure stick. Remove old polish with a nonacetone polish remover (acetone is drying) and buff the surface of the nail so it's smooth.

Be sure to use a base coat, advises Stacey Parks, spa manager at the Claremont Hotel & Spa in Berkeley, Calif. "It helps the polish adhere to the nail longer," she says.

Be wary of wearing polish year-round. According to the APMA, "nail polish locks out moisture and doesn't allow the nail or nail bed to 'breathe,' so people who suffer from already discolored toenails will aggravate their condition by not allowing their nails to be exposed to the air."

Heck, if your feet look good, who needs polish?

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