

## Choosing the brush

As you will probably notice from many of our descriptions of our shaving soaps and creams “**a good quality shaving brush is essential for creating a rich lather**”! The brush is the tool used to whip up lather from a soap or cream, and apply it to your face- a process that should also gently exfoliate the skin and help lift your facial hair away from the skin to better expose them to the razor. Your shaving brush may have more contact with your skin than your razor, and the stiffness and moisture holding properties of the brush will be as important as your technique in lathering for a good shave.

Your basic choice is between badger, boar, horse, horse and badger mix, and synthetic hair. Badger is the most popular, though boar and horse hair both have fans. A cheaper brush whose shape has been achieved by trimming the hair rather than by careful arrangement will feel coarser due to the blunter tips of the hair. Badger hair is graded into different qualities, the most expensive also being the softest, although the different manufacturers do not co-ordinate their grading standards. Coarser bristles will soften slightly as they are broken in through use.

**Pure badger** is the coarsest, most readily available and therefore the cheapest grade of badger hair. As a coarser grade of hair, pure badger is good for working up lather from a solid soap.

**Best badger** is a softer grade, and better at absorbing water than pure badger. Best badger tends to be lighter in color than pure grades. Best badger grades are better at lathering products that require more water to be added, such as particularly dense creams. Best badger brushes from manufacturers such as Vulfix are generally considered good value for money.

**Super badger** is identified by lighter tips, greater density, and a shape made without trimming, making for a much softer brush. Super badger has an even higher absorbency than best badger, aiding the creation of a rich, well-hydrated lather.

**Silvertip** is the rarest and therefore most expensive grade of hair, with the softest tips and highest water absorbency of any grade; although despite its softer feel against the skin, silvertip has similar lathering properties to super badger.

**Boar** brushes are often also called “pure bristle”, and are coarser than badger hair. Boar brushes are not graded in the same way as badger, although there is a great deal of variety in brushes. Boar hair may be dyed to resemble badger, bleached or left with their natural appearance. As with badger, the hair may be trimmed to shape. Unlike badger, boar hair may split over time, leading to a finer, softer feel over time. Boar holds less water than badger, but can still produce a great lather. Badger hair brushes are particularly popular in Italy.

**Horse** is unique among the natural bristle options in that it can be obtained without harming the animal. Horse hair tends to hold more water than boar, and is softer than pure badger brushes, but not quite as soft as the higher grades of badger. Horse brushes benefit from washing before use, as they can initially smell distinctly “natural”. Horse would likely be a more popular choice, if not for an anthrax scare circa World War I, which led to other brush materials becoming more dominant.

**Synthetic** brushes vary in quality, and are still being developed. Older brushes had poor water retention and varying stiffness properties. The more recent synthetic offerings are verging on the quality of natural brushes, and may eventually surpass natural brushes in quality. At this

time however, natural brushes vary so much that anyone considering choosing one is advised to seek out recent reviews of any models that interest them.

The size of the brush loft and handle is largely a matter of personal preference, which can only be established by trying one! For a first time buyer, “liking the look” of a brush is probably as good a reason to pick a particular size and shape of brush as any.

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