

Teaching Your Dog to Tolerate Nail Trimming

By now you have discovered how sharp dog toenails can be! Those little nails will need to be trimmed frequently over the lifetime of your pet. It's a good idea to get him or her used to this procedure early so that you can do this basic grooming task easily and often. The more often that you trim the nails, the shorter you will be able to keep them. When the nail grows out, the living portion of the nail bed, which contains sensitive nerves and blood vessels, grows out too. The more often you trim the nails, the shorter the nail bed will stay, allowing you to keep the nails short.

Many pets are very sensitive about having their nails trimmed or their feet touched at all. Some pets are instinctively cautious about having their front feet touched, so you will have to show him early on that it is not an unpleasant experience. Before you ever attempt to trim your pet's nails, begin by touching its legs, feet and toes, and pair this with lots of tasty treats and praise. When your pet is resting, begin petting your dog, gently passing your hands over its back and legs. If this is well tolerated, you may wish to give it a small food treat. Do not try to do too much the first time.

Gradually increase the amount of time that you are touching the pets feet. Eventually, you should be able to slip your fingers in between each toe, gently squeezing each one to flex the nail. Apply gentle pressure as you hold each foot and manipulate the leg. Do not attempt this exercise when your pet is in an agitated or in a playful state, as it is most likely to resent any restriction to its movement. Once your pet tolerates having its feet touched during quiet times, you may begin to incorporate this into elements of play time. Train you dog to assume a "down/stay" position when it retrieves a ball, for example, and "shake" its paw before continuing the game.

There is more variety between the shape of toe nails in dogs than in cats. Some pets' nails grow in a more curved shape, as compared with those growing more parallel to the ground. This may determine how short they may be trimmed. Even a skilled professional can misjudge the depth to which a nail may be trimmed. It is also not uncommon for a pet to withdraw a foot while the nail is being clipped, because of pressure on sensitive nail areas.

If you are unsure of how to trim your pet's toenails, ask your veterinarian or technician to show you how. They can show you where the sensitive nerves and blood vessels are likely to be found. The nail bed is seen as a pinkish triangle at the base of the nail, however, it may not be evident in dark-colored nails.

It is better to cut less than to cut more than necessary! Trim off small sections at a time and stop short of the sensitive part of the nail. Cutting the nail too short results in a painful experience for your pet. Cut your pet's nails frequently, a little at a time, rather than occasionally when toe nails are long. This way, nail trimming will become a routine event, rather than a periodic wrestling match. Continue to manipulate your pet's feet and toes between nail trims so that it remains a familiar sensation.

