

Trimming Your Dog's Nails

Dogs need nail trims on a regular basis to prevent overgrown nails that can lead to ingrown nails, which cause more serious problems down the road. However, the task can seem daunting to some owners. To make nail trims a positive experience for both you and your dog, you will want to have a plan and lots of yummy treats on hand.

Nail clippers

If possible, accustom your dog to nail trims at an early age. They can tolerate the procedure quite well once they are familiar with it. Before we get started with the standard nail trim, let's look at the different styles of nail trimmers available.

- Pliers: Has the same working mechanism as scissors and is great for larger breeds that have thicker nails.
- Scissor: Works similar to scissors and are meant for puppies or smaller breeds.
- Guillotine: Just as it sounds, it works like a guillotine system. You place the end of the dog's nail inside the hole. You then squeeze the clippers and a blade comes down to clip the nail.
- Grinder: This is a battery-operated machine that, instead of cutting the nail, slowly grinds it down. This can be useful for dogs that have thicker nails or dogs that do not like the feel of the other clippers. Keep in mind that the grinder does make noise when turned on and when filing, so it may be scary for some dogs.

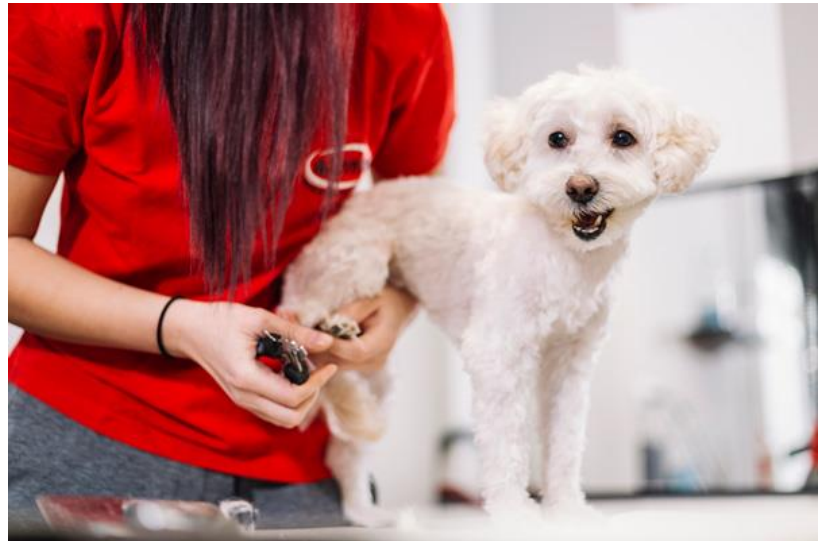
Standard nail trim

Now that we've reviewed some of the different types of clippers, we will go over the standard nail trim for dogs that are comfortable and used to getting their nails trimmed regularly, every 2-3 weeks.

1. Start with finding a comfortable place in your home where there will be no distractions or interruptions.
2. Once settled, take the dog's paw and gently press down on the pad, which will separate the nails. Make sure that the fur is not in the way.
3. Now that you have a good view of the nails, take the clippers and prepare to cut from the tip of the nail toward the quick (see "What is the Quick?" below).

If your dog has lighter-coloured nails

You should be able to see the quick as indicated in the photo above right. If you feel comfortable you can cut close to the quick, or trim the nail little by little, stopping just before the quick.



If your dog has dark-coloured nails

Begin to trim the tip of the nail a bit at a time and continue to do so until you see an oval starting to appear at the top of the cut surface of the nail (see photo right). This oval means you are close to the quick and should stop trimming.



What is the quick?

The quick is a blood vessel and a nerve inside the dog's nails. As mentioned, it is sometimes hard to see, especially on dogs with darker nails, so it's very important to trim little by little to prevent hitting this sensitive nerve. If you accidentally hit the quick, your dog may respond with a yelp and you will then notice the nail bleeding. Make sure you have Kwik Stop on hand; this is a topical styptic powder you can get at your pet store that stops the bleeding. Your dog may show some discomfort when walking afterwards. Be sure to avoid wet areas while the nail is healing. Seek medical attention from your veterinarian, if necessary.

Desensitization and counter-conditioning

Dogs that have not had their nails trimmed in the past or had a negative experience from the quick being cut may be difficult to handle during the procedure. Below are some tips on how to get your dog confident and comfortable with nail trims:

1. Start by feeding your dog food or treats that they really enjoy.
2. Begin handling your dog's paws while they are focused on eating. Do this for a few moments then stop handling their paws and feeding. When you handle their paws again, resume feeding them. Your dog will learn that good things happen when you are near their paws.
3. Next, present the clippers and begin to tap them on the nails a few times while the dog is eating. Then stop tapping and feeding; we want the dog to understand that they will get food when their paws are being handled and no food when they're not.
4. Now, begin to trim the nails as you are feeding the dog. If they stop eating, stop trimming. Begin again when they resume eating. If your dog is showing any signs of discomfort or fear, stop the procedure and try it another day so they don't develop a negative association.
5. If your dog becomes aggressive or highly stressed during nail trimming, seek advice from a professional.

Extra tips

- Do not punish your dog ever for their behaviour during nail trimming. It will only increase their negative association with the experience.
- Do not forget to cut the dew claw, which is located at the side of the paw. The dew claw does not get worn down like the rest of the nails since it does not scrape against rough surfaces.

References:

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drsophiayin.com/blog/entry/counterconditioning-for-toenail-trim-aggression/

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