TRIMMING YOUR PET’S NAILS: HOW TO DO IT PROPERLY AND PAINLESSLY

If you're a pet parent with an aversion for trimming your dog's nails, you're definitely not alone. In fact, many people are so hesitant to doing it themselves that they consistently outsource it to a veterinarian clinic or pet shop with grooming services.

However, what often happens in these situations is that too much time passes between appointments, and the dog's nails get uncomfortably long. This can cause injury from a nail that catches on something or curls under and digs into their paw.  Therefore, learning to do it yourself, in the comfort of your own home – is something that can save both time and money.

There are several advantages to learning to trim your dog's nails at home. Not only can you consistently maintain the nails at a safe length, but you can also avoid your dog's "car ride stress" and/or "vet visit stress." And since you know your pet better than anyone else, you can certainly comfort them if you see signs of fear and take it slow when necessary (even doing a nail a day if that works best).

First, lets review the five basic components of your dog’s paw. Taking both fore and hind legs and feet together, dog paws all have the same five basic sections.

**1. Digital pads:** Also known as paw pads or toe pads, each dog foot, hind and rear, has a paw pad for each of their four toes.

**2. Claws:** Whether you call them toes, digits, or phalanges, each toe ends in a claw, and each claw grows out of the bone and shares its blood supply.

**3. Dewclaws:** The smallest claw on a dog’s foreleg are similar to the human thumb. All dogs have dewclaws on their front paws. Some, but not all, have dewclaws on their hind legs, and a few breeds are born with double dewclaws on their hind legs.

**4. Carpal pad:** The carpal pad is the small, pointed pad just above the dewclaw on a dog’s front leg.

**5. Metacarpal and metatarsal pads:** The largest paw pad, the metacarpal pad is a heart-shaped pad in the center of a dog’s front paws. The metatarsal pad is the largest paw pad on the rear paws. They are named for the bones that they protect and cover.  
  
Once you learn the sections of your pet’s paw, it’s easier to understand where to hold, touch, clip and when to be extra gentle. Since the paw pads are loaded with nerve receptors that help protect them when they walk and run, its vital to remember their extreme sensitivities. This is why most dogs are uncomfortable when a human tries to "hold hands" with them — it's also the reason they object to having their paws held during nail trims. They are delicate and very conscious of their paws and everything (aka nails) linked to them.

So keep in mind the first rule of nail trimming: clip enough – *but not too much*.  
Trying to figure out how far up to clip your dog's nails is one of the more unsettling aspects of nail trims for many pet owners. It isn't like trimming human nails, which can be taken all the way down to the fingertips. Dogs use their nails for traction, which may be why the quick of the nail isn't right at the skin line like ours is.   
  
Learning the colouring of your pet’s nails is also incredibly important when it comes to cutting nails. Many dogs have both white and dark nails, and dark ones are especially tricky because you can't really see the pinkish quick, which is the blood vessel inside the nail that nourishes it. Try shining a small flashlight on dark nails so you can see what you’re doing.   
  
If you've never used dog nail clippers before, they can seem a bit intimidating, so just imagine how your dog feels! Always test the clippers first to ensure the blades are in proper working order. Regardless of the clipper style, use a firm grip on the clippers and use your fingers to separate the dog's toes and make the whole process easier.

### Trimming with a clipper:

1. Assess the length of the nails. Familiarize yourself with the quick and the overgrown nail. This will be important.
2. In a comfortable environment, set a blanket or towel down on the floor and sit with your dog. Ensure to give treats and keep your pet calm
3. Hold the clipper tool in your dominant hand.
4. Hold your dog’s paw firmly in your other hand — thumb on the foot pad, fingers atop the foot, near the nail bed.
5. Begin at the very tip
6. Only trim about 1 to 2 mm at a time, gradually moving toward the quick.
7. Examine the cross-section of your dog’s nail each time you cut. When you start seeing a tan-colored oval, you’re nearing the quick … so stop cutting.
8. Use a nail file to smooth rough edges.

If you cut too short or crooked, remember they will be okay, but it can be painful.  It may mean you have to go back a few steps to get your pet comfortable with the idea of having their nails trimmed again.  To stop the bleeding there are some household items in your cupboard that can help (such a placing a small amount of cornstarch or flour in a Kleenex and hold it to the nail adding pressure).

Keep in mind that in addition to clipping your dogs paws to maintain the ongoing health, your dog’s paws are just as important to keep clean and healthy. In fact, a dog’s paws serve a multitude of basic and specialized functions. In addition to walking, digging, self-grooming, and play, they also contain scent and sweat glands, which are useful for territorial marking and temperature control. Proper care of a dog’s paws and claws is essential to her long-term health and well-being. Regular washing and massaging from an early age can prevent many health issues.

Depending on the breed and size of your dog, you'll need to clip its nails and inspect its paws anywhere from once per week to once per month. Remember that your pet is generally the most comfortable in their own home – so take advantage of their comfort level and make the nail-cutting process more of a recognized bonding-time. And remember to go slow – practice always makes perfect when it comes to steady pet grooming.