



How to Cut a Dog's Nails Without The Blood, Sweat and Tears!

By Marion Herbertson

Knowing how to cut a dog's nails is so important and if you're wondering how to trim a dog's nails - you need look no further. As usual, we've done all the research for you and presented you with a step by step guide on this delicate procedure.

Your Dog's Nails

Knowing not only how, but also when to cut a dog's nails is so important. Your dog's nails grow constantly and how often they need to be clipped will depend on your dog's lifestyle. If your dog does a lot of his walking on hard surfaces, he may very well need little or no extra help in keeping his nails short as his nails will be naturally worn away through friction.

However, if like our dogs, your dog mainly stays on grass, sea, sand and woodland tracks, clipping dog nails becomes an essential part of his or her grooming and it becomes important that you know how to clip dog nails.

Not knowing how to cut a dog's nails and failure in clipping dog nails will lead to crippling pain in your dog's paws and could lead to permanent damage and malformation.

If clipping dog nails is really not your strong point, take your dog to your vet or groomer. They know how to cut a dog's nails - and it is amazing how much less of a prima donna your dog will be with total strangers!

When To Start

Dogs are often reluctant to have their nails clipped; therefore, starting the process at a very young age is a good idea. Initially, get your dog accustomed to you simply holding and stroking their paws. Then progress to applying light pressure on their paws and nails - lightly pinching their nails between your finger and thumb. Reward them for allowing this.

Then, after a lesson from your vets in how to cut a dog's nails, lightly trim a couple of nails a day. Just trim off the tips - this lessens the chances of you cutting too deep and frightening your dog off. Talk to your dog in a soothing voice all the time and reward him with his favorite treat and a romp straight after. He will gradually grow accustomed to this unpleasant procedure and learn to at least put up with it.

Tools You Will Need

When you're wondering about how to cut a dog's nails, there are a variety of nail clippers and trimmers on the market. The guillotine type is my favorite tool when trimming dog nails, though a strong claw cutter may be required for the bigger breeds and basset hounds - they have incredibly large claws!

Sometimes you may want to use a small file or a dremel tool to file down any jagged edges after trimming a dog's nails, but frankly, my dogs can't wait to get away from me, so I'm happy to let them round off any rough edges in the normal course of their everyday walks. It is also advisable to keep a styptic pen handy just in case you clip into your dog's quick - but we'll discuss this later.

Anatomy of a Dog's Nail

Knowing how to cut dog's nails is easier when you know the anatomy of a dog's nail. A dog's nail is constructed of a hard outer cover, which protects the quick which is the inner soft part containing blood vessels and tender nerve endings. In dogs with light colored nails, the quick can often be seen as being faintly pinkish in color and is thus easy to avoid cutting into.

In the more common black nailed variety, the quick is totally invisible. Therefore, knowing exactly how to cut a dog's nails in this case is imperative. In these cases, trimming off little nibbles instead of large slices is more advisable. Keep checking

the clipped part of your dog's nail and look out for a dark spot in the middle of the newly clipped area - this shows the start of the quick - do not cut too far into this.

Taking just tiny nibbles, you will then start to see a pale dot in the middle of the dark area. Stop there - or else you are likely to hurt your dog. Also, don't forget your dog's dew claws. Growing on the inside of his legs and not in contact with the floor, these do not get worn away and will sometimes curl completely over causing your dog to get snagged in undergrowth, his bedding, etc. This can be very painful, so do keep those neatly trimmed too.

The Best Way of Clipping Dog Nails

The best way how to cut a dog's nails is to have the dog lying on a raised table or other surface. Do remember to put a non-slip mat for your dog to sit or stand on so she doesn't slip and hurt herself. Having someone strong hold your dog in their arms while you quickly clip a couple of nails is another effective way of doing this.

However, your dog may be as good as gold and let you cut their claws with no fuss at all - in which case you are a very fortunate person! Carefully read the instructions for the nail clipping tool of your choice. For example, with the guillotine, you need to cut from the underneath of your dog's claw upwards. Never clip downwards. Position the tool in the right place, wait for an opportune moment when your dog stops wriggling, double check that the clipper is in the right place and squeeze firmly and smoothly - the nail will just pop off.

When wondering when and how to cut dog's nails, little and often is the best policy. Just nibbling off the ends of each claw will be less stressful for your dog - and yourself! The point to aim for is to trim off any bit that protrudes over your dog's pad. Thus, when he stands, your dog's claws should not touch the ground. The good thing is, very much like our own nails, the more you trim your dog's nails, the more the quick will recede. Therefore, clipping dog nails doesn't have to be done all at once - take your time.

Ooops! You've Cut Into the Quick!

However experienced you are in knowing how to cut a dog's nails, accidents will happen. Clipping into the quick will cause your dog to yelp in pain - I hate it when that happens. And, just as would happen if you cut into your quick, a fair amount of bleeding will occur. As much as you try to not let this happen - it will at some stage - so it is best that you learn to deal with it.

If learning how to cut a dog's nails is all a bit much for you, take your dog to a groomer (some will even come to your home) to have her nails trimmed. It doesn't cost very much and at least your dog won't hold it against you if her nails should accidentally be cut too deep!

If bleeding does occur, you have three options :

1. You let the bleeding stop normally - but this could go on for about 5 - 7 minutes (call the vet if it goes on for any longer) and be tramped into your carpets as your dog seeks to get away from you. Also, your dog will try to lick her bleeding nail, which could cause the bleeding to continue even longer.
2. You can hold a piece of tissue paper or a pinch of corn starch firmly against the source of the bleeding - if your dog will hang around long enough! – Or
3. You can keep a styptic pen or stick handy as part of your dog's grooming kit, which when applied to your dog's nail will stop the bleeding instantly. It doesn't hurt your dog - which is a bonus. You can get this from your vet or a good pet store.

General Feet Check-Ups

Though knowing how to cut a dog's nails is important, just as important is checking your dog's feet regularly. Check her pads for thorns or broken glass. Our dogs love paddling in the sea and I also always ensure their paws are rinsed when they get home as dog skin is pretty sensitive to salt water. I always check them when they come back from their forest walks too - I watch out for any signs of limping. Our dog, Holly in particular, being long haired, tends to bring half the woodland walk back home with her and I've occasionally found thorny bits buried deep within her coat.

In winter, I pay special attention to our dogs' paws because of the salt gritting which takes place and also because they may have stepped on something they couldn't see under the snow.

In Conclusion

It is so important to keep your dog's nails trimmed and her feet in good condition. Walking on overly long nails is painful - can lead to broken nails, nail bed infection and huge amounts of bleeding - and can also lead to ingrown nails which break into the pads of your dogs paws.

Just a little bit of regular preventative action on your part can make life so much easier for your dog. Knowing how to cut a dog's nails and just a little extra care and attention will go a long way towards keeping your dog active and healthy for a long, long time to come.

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