

# How to Trim Your Dog's Nails Safely



Nail trimming is an essential part of dog grooming and well-maintained nails are one clear sign of your dog's good health and hygiene. Professional groomers will perform the task for squeamish owners, but dog nail trimming is a simple procedure if done correctly.

Since nail trimming can be an anxiety-laden experience for many dogs, start handling your puppy's feet and trimming their nails when they're young, so they become accustomed to the process. Some dogs will sit in your lap or on a table while you clip their nails, while others may need some form of restraint.

**Tip:** You SHOULD make the process more fun for your dog by letting them lick peanut butter off a spoon while you handle the nails. Half the battle is making sure your dog trusts that this isn't going to be a terrible experience.

## Getting Your Dog Comfortable

In as little as one week, you can have one of those rare dogs who doesn't mind nail trimming one bit. But, if it takes your pup a little longer to get used to it, don't despair. Be patient, keep a gentle and positive attitude, and continue to offer praise and treats. Make sure to use safe, dog-friendly clippers or grinders.

**Tip:** It helps if you frequently touch and hold your puppy's paws (gently and cheerfully) right from the first day, so they won't become sensitive to having their feet handled.



- **Day 1:** Let your puppy sniff the nail clipper or grinder. Give a treat and praise.
- **Day 2:** Touch the nail clipper or grinder lightly to each paw. Give a treat and praise.
- **Day 3:** Touch the nail clipper to each paw and squeeze the clipper so the puppy hears the sound, or turn the grinder on and let the puppy feel the vibration. Don't actually trim a nail. Give a treat and praise.
- **Day 4:** Touch the nail clipper or grinder to your puppy's feet again. Give a treat and praise.
- **Day 5:** Try trimming off just the very tiniest tip from one front paw nail. Only do one nail. Offer lots of happy praise and a treat if your puppy lets you. Even if he lets you, just do one. Repeat every day until he lets you do this and doesn't seem to mind.
- **Day 6:** Try trimming just the tip off of just two nails.
- **Day 7:** Keep working your way up, trimming additional nails each day, until you've got them all and your puppy doesn't mind. Practice even when you don't need to clip a nail. Even pretending you are clipping and going through the motions help your pup get used to the whole process.



## Trimming Your Dog's Nails

There are several types of dog nail trimmers, including scissors, grinder tools specifically designed for dogs, and guillotine types. You can use whatever type you are most comfortable with, or whatever works best for your dog. It's a good idea to have some styptic powder or other clotting powder on hand to stop bleeding in case you cut a nail too short.

If you've never clipped a dog's nails before, you may want to have your veterinarian or vet tech give you a lesson on how to do it.



**1** Pick up one paw, and firmly but gently place your thumb on the pad of a toe and your forefinger on top of the toe on the skin above the nail. Push your thumb slightly up and backward on the pad while pushing your forefinger forward. This extends the nail. (Don't squeeze the paw!)



**2** Using your other hand, clip the tip only, straight across. Avoid clipping past the curve of the nail, or you risk hitting what is called the quick. A nick there is painful and will cause bleeding. It's harder to see the quick on darker nails, so clip only the hooklike part of the nail that turns down.

---

**3** Examine the paw pads for foreign objects or injuries. In winter, clean your dog's feet after he has gone outdoors; this removes de-icing chemicals, salt, snow, and ice, which can injure the feet or make your dog sick if he licks his paws.

Here are the steps to follow to properly trim your dog's nails:

1. Pick up a paw and firmly, but gently, place your thumb on the pad of a toe and your forefinger on the top of the toe on the skin above the nail. Make sure none of your dog's fur is in the way.

2. Push your thumb slightly up and backward on the pad, while pushing your forefinger forward. This extends the nail.
3. Clip only the tip of the nail, straight across. Include the dewclaws, located on the inner side of the paw.
4. Avoid clipping past the curve of the nail or you risk hitting what is called the quick (the pink area of the nail that contains the blood vessels). A nick there is painful and will bleed. For dogs with dark nails, watch for a chalky white ring.

### **How to Grind Your Dog's Nails**

- Only grind a small part of your dog's nail at a time. Support the dog's toe firmly but gently.
- Grind across the bottom of the nail and then carefully in from the tip of the nail, smoothing rough edges.
- For better control, hold the grinder higher up, towards the top.
- Keep your dogs comfortable and take note of any sensitivities
- If your dog has long hair, make sure to keep it back from the grinding tool so it doesn't get caught.