

The nails of the dog are considered a specialized skin structure. They tend to grow in a circular fashion, which gives the nail a normal *CURVE*. If allowed to grow, they may form a complete circle. This is commonly seen in the dewclaws. If not trimmed, it will frequently form a complete circle and grow back into the leg. This can cause a painful infection.

Letting the nails grow too long is uncomfortable and can interfere with healthy growth and development, throwing the dog off-balance when he walks. It can also be painful in geriatric dogs.

Overgrown nails push up on the phalanges (toes) of the dog's feet. If all the nails aren't trimmed properly, the dog will begin to compensate, on one foot or the other, thus causing discomfort in muscles, joints and legs.

Many housedogs do not receive adequate abrasive wear. Consequently, nails grow to dangerous lengths unless clipped. This can lead to lameness. It is important to trim nails on these dogs to maintain attractive and safe lengths. Filing them helps to smooth the rough edges, alleviating accidental scratching of you, children or older adults.

Try this: put your hand in a cup shaped form on a table -- palm on table -- nails facing down. Now imagine having extremely long fingernails. Your fingers are pushed in an exaggerated motion, upward, while still keeping the palm of your hand on the table. How does it feel? If you are doing this correctly, it should feel very tense and uncomfortable. Now imagine being a dog, walking or running like this!

In white non-pigmented nails you can see the blood vessel. Study these nails to learn the relationship of blood supply to nail length. This will assist you in determining the proper trim on darker nails. Another clue is to look at the backside of the nail. Usually, you can see and feel a "meaty like" portion. Do not cut down into this meaty section. It is too close. If you begin by trimming a little at a time, you will notice a circular ring in the nail appearing similar to that of tree bark after cutting. You are getting close to the blood vessel, or quick, as it is commonly called.

If you do cut a blood vessel - - - don't panic! Try to stay calm or inevitably your dog will get even more upset than s/he already is. Apply an aid to stop the bleeding such as styptic powder or gel (i.e. Kwik Stop). It may seem like "*chillarama*" but the bleeding will stop. Apply pressure with a paper towel for a few moments before applying the Kwik-Stop. It will adhere more quickly. Very important: Be calm ... your dog is already stinging because of the cut vessel. Stress will only make the experience worse, thus setting the stage for future clippings.

There are two styles of clippers and, you can purchase more expensive grinders. Be careful of long-haired breeds. Hair can get stuck in the blade. The guillotine clippers work well on small and medium size dogs. The blades need to be replaced frequently for sharpness. The pliers or scissors style clipper with two cutting edges work best on large and giant breed dogs (see pics). You may want to file the nails after clipping to eliminate roughness.

How you hold the dog and cut the nails is a matter of preference. The key is getting the job done as quickly and as stress-free as possible. The easiest way is with your dog secure on a grooming table in a "Stand – Stay". Smaller dogs can be placed on a table (washing machine) on a Rubbermaid mat. Medium dogs can be done on the floor.

THREE KEY POINTS FOR TRIMMING YOUR DOG'S NAILS

1. **Breathe!** Cut nails when you have the time, not when you are stressed out.
2. **Desensitize!** Dogs generally do not like to have their paws handled. If they have not been introduced at an early age to touching, they may resist nail trimming. If they have a "bad" (in their perception) experience, they may resist it altogether.
3. When trimming a young dog's nails, use patience to gain the dog's confidence. You may need to increase your own confidence in cutting nails too! This extra time will prevent a negative association making this a tolerable procedure in the future.
4. Begin by taking a deep breath, then hold the paw and lightly do some filing. If this is too much too soon, touch and back off. Go slowly, be positive and give a treat when the dog lets you hold the paw longer. Eventually touch it with the clipping device of choice.
5. Move on to the clipper, trimming only a small amount at a time. Praise and be encouraging.
6. As a nail grows in length, so does its blood supply. A long nail cannot be trimmed to its normal length (*at one time*) without causing bleeding from the blood vessels. If you trim an abnormally long set of nails, **trim only the safe amount, without causing bleeding**. Repeat trimming at 7 to 10 day intervals. During this period the blood supply will recede so the nail may be gradually reduced to a more comfortable and safer length.

HAPPY CLIPPING!

Hind Legs: Gently ease them back, holding securely, then clip. You should be standing by your dog's side, facing the rear-end.

Front Legs: Ditto. Bend them at the knee, lifting them back. *Be mindful of older dogs with arthritis, injured or sore joints or muscles.* With smaller dogs, you can reach over to do the other leg, giving the dog stability by leaning on you. This helps to secure the dog's head and body. An **alternate way** is to lift the front legs forward, holding the paw up. This may be more difficult as you lean back and raise the leg and paw high enough to get a good look at the underside of the nail for cutting. This can be extremely uncomfortable for the "older" dog. You may need two people. Work as a team and be positive. Attitude is important. Speak calmly and don't over-excite or evoke fear in the dog. Have plenty of treats ready to shape the desired behavior. Dogs may not like having their nails clipped, but they will learn to tolerate the unpleasantness if they associate it with a positive reward that follows; a massage, a walk, a few tosses of the Frisbee.

Alternate Method: Have a Groomer, Vet or trusted, experienced friend do it for you! Choose what works best for you and your dog. If the experience will cause lasting misery in your relationship, this alternate decision may be a better choice!

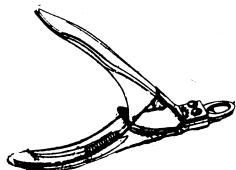


NAIL CLIPPING!

Pliers or Scissor Style Clippers



GUILLOTINE



OSTER GRINDER



Awareness
Education
Relationship
Well-Being

Dog Talk
Training and Wellness
Sanctuary

24 Tenney Road
Pelham, NH 03076
(603) 635-DOGS (3647)

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