

Trimming Your Pet's Nails

Trimming your pet's nails is not an easy task. It is probably best done by taking your dog or cat to your veterinarian's office, where the staff is skilled at this procedure and can usually accomplish the job in a few minutes without undue stress for your pet. If you wish to try nail trims at home, however, here are some helpful tips:

The first thing to know is that you cannot be nervous or hesitant, because your pet will sense this and also will become nervous. This can lead to a struggle and will cause stress for you, your pet and everyone in the house. In addition, your pet will now view the procedure as an unpleasant task and will give you a hard time when you attempt it again. It is critical to first get your pet used to you handling its paws and toes. Start by softly holding the paws and gently playing with each toe. Do this when your pet is calm, and if he begins to stress out, stop immediately. Do this each day. Also, you may want to consider giving your pet a treat each time you start to handle its feet, so he thinks that this is a good thing.

The next thing to do is to get your pet used to nail trimmers by leaving them out and letting your pet sniff and "become acquainted" with them. You also can hold them in your hand and move the handles as if trimming something, so that your pet becomes familiar with the

sound. Once you have your pet desensitized to having its toes touched and your pet is used to the trimmers, you are ready to take the next step. It is much easier if you start the desensitization process with a new kitten or puppy, but you can still have success with an older pet by being patient and not rushing the process. It will be most difficult-and, perhaps, even impossible-if your pet already has had a bad nail-trimming experience. A lot of pets simply do not like to have their paws touched, so it is very important that you take your time and get them used to that first.

A Word about Nail Trimmers:

Before taking the next step and actually trimming a nail, we should discuss what type of nail trimmer to use. The kind of nail trimmer that typically is found in pet stores and the pet department of major retailers is a silver handle that you squeeze to slide a blade against a metal loop. This is the worst kind of nail trimmer to buy, because it crushes the nail, causing pain before it cuts the nail. You want to buy a trimmer that has two blades that have an open circle to slide over the nail, and when you squeeze the two handles together, the blades cut the nail from each side. There are small versions of this trimmer that have a scissor-like handle, and there is a larger version that has two handles like a pair of pliers. The small ones are good for toy breeds, but if in doubt, it is better to get the larger pair as the blades will cut more quickly and more easily.

Once your pet is used to both having his paws touched and the sound of the trimmers, you can slide a nail into the trimmer and cut it very quickly. It is vital that you act quickly and decisively to cut the nail. It also helps to have

a member of your family or a friend hold and soothe your pet as you trim his or her nails. One good way to distract your pet during the procedure is to have your assistant hold a treat in a closed fist to distract your pet, keeping him busy as he tries to get it out of your assistant's hand. Again, if your pet is stressed or struggles, stop immediately and try again another day. It is also a good idea to ask your veterinarian is one of his or her technicians can teach you to trim your pet's nails. The old rule of teaching-first listen to instructions, then watch someone else do it, and finally do it yourself under supervision-is a wise adage for developing a comfort level with a new task such as this.

Should You Dremel?

A dremel is a rotary tool that has an attachment much like sandpaper that will file down the dog's nails without having to use a trimmer. I do not think a dremel will work well when trimming a cat's nails; he or she is unlikely to sit still at the sound of the dremel. This is a more advanced nail-trimming technique, and your pet needs to be used to normal trimming before you attempt to use this tool. Once again, it is important to desensitize your pet to the dremel- you want your pet to be very comfortable with the sight and sound of the dremel before you ever touch it to one of his nails. Again, praising your pet while he or she sniffs the dremel can be extremely helpful.

When using a dremel, you will definitely want an assistant to hold, soothe and distract your pet to minimize stress. Because the dremel is noisy and may scare pets, some owners prefer to file their pet's nails down by hand. This is a perfectly fine thing to do, but, again, it takes time and patience to desensitize the pet to the procedure.

As you can see, trimming, filing or dremeling a pet's nails is not something to be taken lightly, and that is why it is best to leave the job to the professionals at your veterinarian's office. The important thing is to be sensitive to how your pet is reacting and do your best to keep him or her calm and comfortable.