

Clickety Clickety Tap Tap

By Brenda Howard

If you can hear your dog's nails on flooring they are too long! I have seen dogs crippled by nails that have grown so overly long that they bend backward, or have grown into the dog's foot pad.

Have you ever tried to trim the nails of a dog that says "No!"? Not so easy! Bull riding has nothing on struggling with a 100 pound dog that doesn't want its nails trimmed!

In an ideal world, you would have worked with your young puppy from day one to teach him that grooming and nail trimming is not scary, and is in fact a good thing. But the world isn't perfect and most of us either don't know how to train a dog to enjoy grooming or just didn't want to take the time. Luckily, you can teach old dogs new tricks.

If your dog doesn't enjoy grooming it could be because he hasn't been taught that it's ok for you – his 2-legger – to touch him. Teach your dog to be comfortable with being touched. You can do this anywhere – the living room while watching TV. You will restrain (gently) the dog from moving away from you by holding his collar in one hand. With your other hand you will slowly stroke him along his back. Do not remove your "petting" hand until you see the dog relax a bit. Your dog's sign of relaxing is to lick his lips, yawn, sigh, or hold still. You will reward his relaxing by removing the petting for a moment and then begin again. As you work your hand across his back, slowly begin touching him on his hip, neck, and legs. You will want to spend extra time on areas he doesn't like to be touched, and go slower. Basically you are desensitizing your dog to touch. Repeat this for roughly 10 to 15 times. Perform "relax" sessions each day for a week. At the end of a week you should have a dog that will allow you to touch him while standing.

To teach "Rex" that touching his feet and toes is acceptable, you will use the same technique used for teaching body touch. While gently restraining the dog next to you (again maybe while watching TV) begin to touch his feet. Slowly work your way up to being able to touch and hold his toes using the same method you used on body touching. Once you can hold the foot, slightly spread the toes and hold them gently as if you are bracing them for filing. Repeat this over and over.

Each nail has a vein in it that is receded into the nail. In nails allowed to grow longer and longer, the vein will also grow longer. Therefore you can only cut off the tip without causing bleeding. The vein can be seen easily in white nails, but can't be seen at all in dark or black nails.

Once you have convinced "Rex" that it's ok to touch his feet and toes, you can choose which tool you want to use to trim the nails. There are three basic tools – a nail file, a nail clipper, or a power rotary sanding tool like a Dremel ®.

For dogs that are extremely frightened of toenail trimming, use a nail file to slowly shorten long nails. This method will take longer. Hold

the dog comfortably on a table or in your lap and begin with the back toes first. Separate the toes gently and hand file them.

To trim a dog's nail using a clipper, purchase a quality nail clipper - dull clippers will pinch and not cut cleanly. Set aside plenty of time to clip nails. Dogs tend to pull and jerk their feet away from you when they are afraid of nail clippers, which can cause you to quick the nail, so take it slowly. Let "Rex" smell the clipper first. Touch the clipper to the toes without clipping. Work your way up to actually clipping a nail. Clip away only very small amounts of nail at a time. Try to avoid quicking because it hurts! It will be better to clip a tiny bit every other day to avoid a quick than to try to take off too much at once.

What to do if you quick a nail using a clipper? Keep some styptic powder on hand. The styptic powder will help coagulate the blood. If the quick is minor, the blood will stop fast. If you quick deeply, however, you may need to visit your veterinarian.

Professionals use small hand held power rotary devices like a Dremel ® tool. These are wonderful to use for filing dog nails because they can do the job much faster and do not quick the nails. If you decide that you want to try a power tool like a Dremel, you will need to desensitize your dog to the sound of the tool. In much the same way that you taught him it's ok for you to touch his feet and body, you will want him to slowly condition him to the sound of the tool before you ever touch it to his nails. Once you are ready to begin filing, touch the tool to the nail in small tapping motions. The nail can become hot from the steady friction of the rotary sander and tapping will keep the nail from getting uncomfortable for your dog. Take special care with dogs that have long hair – it can become easily caught in the Dremel! Move the hair away from the nail before bringing the rotary sander close to the feet.

You now have several options for nail trimming! You can teach your dog to allow you to give him a "pedicure" by using a file, a nail clipper, or a powered rotary sanding tool. Or you can do what many others do – pour yourself a drink and make reservations with your veterinarian or a professional groomer! Anyway you get it done; your dog will be healthier for it!

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