



Trimming Your Pet's Nails

Let's face it, most pets don't like having their nails trimmed. But unless your pet walks on the pavement every day, so the nails wear down on their own, he may need a nail trim once or twice a month. The key is to stay calm and relaxed. Be firm but positive. And provide your pet with praise and plenty of treats.

Handling the Paws

Help your pet become accustomed to having its paws handled. It's best to start when he is a puppy or kitten.

Touch the paws and toes gently, and praise your pet. If your pet is older, try starting with a belly rub and working your way down to the paws.

Although your pet's nails may not need to be trimmed as frequently as twice a month, checking his nails every week or two will help keep him used to having his paws handled.

Nail-Trimming Tools

You will need sharp nail trimmers that are designed for pets, in the appropriate size for your pet. There are two types of trimmers: scissor-style and guillotine-style. Scissor-style trimmers cut in both directions and may offer better visibility when clipping the nail. Guillotine-style trimmers have a hole at the top where the nail is inserted and a blade that cuts in one direction.

Restraint

It's always helpful to have someone hold your pet. Overall, the less restraint, the better; heavy restraint often stresses the pet and encourages struggling. Some dogs will allow nail trims while standing on a table. Others are more comfortable lying on their sides. With cats, gently holding the scruff of the neck may help calm them. If your pet is likely to bite when stressed, consider using a muzzle or having the nails trimmed by a professional.

Making the Cut

When using a scissor-style trimmer, press down on the handles firmly and decisively. If you are using a guillotine-style trimmer, insert the nail through the hole at the top of the clipper, with the blade below, facing away from the paw.

If your pet becomes stressed, take a break. It's okay to only trim one or two nails at a time. If you're still not comfortable, ask a veterinary technician or groomer to demonstrate the procedure for you.

Nail Anatomy

Unlike dogs, cats have retractable nail. If you hold a toe between your thumb and forefinger and press down on the top of the toe, the nail will extend from the paw. This will stabilize the nail and help you see the entire nail.

Each nail has a blood vessel in the center called the quick. If your pet has light colored nails, the quick will appear pink when the nail is viewed from the side. You'll want to trim the nail just below the end of the quick. If your pet has dark nails, you won't be able to see the quick. You'll need to start at the very tip of the nail and make a series of small clips. As you get closer to the quick, a darker circle will start to appear in the center of the nail tip. This tells you that you've reached the quick, and it's time to stop.

If you cut into the quick, don't panic. Even the most experienced nail trimmers cut the quick periodically. The nail will bleed a little, but applying styptic powder (available at most pet stores) should make it stop within a minute or two. Comfort your pet and offer a treat.