

Don't Outsource This, Your Pet Prefers This Home TLC Version

It need not be a dreaded 'avoid at all cost' chore - even if you or your pet are plagued by bad memories. Do as I did with my Rosco - and it may be so quick and nearly pleasant that your pet won't have time to stress out. And that TLC would be an extremely rare gem anywhere else.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- There are many benefits to learning to trim your dog's nails at home
- Since nail trims can be stressful for your dog, the first thing you should do is get her accustomed to having her paws touched and handled
- You can use a nail clipper or a rotary tool, depending on what your dog can tolerate and your own preference
- Nails must be trimmed very carefully to avoid cutting into the quick
- Styptic powder is a must-have and should be at your fingertips before you start the nail trim

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If you're a pet parent with an aversion to **trimming your dog's nails**, you're certainly not alone. In fact, many people are so reluctant to do the deed that they outsource it to their groomer or veterinarian. This approach is fine if you're in a position to make (and pay for) appointments as often as your dog needs her nails clipped.

However, what often happens in these situations is that too much time passes between appointments, and the dog's nails get uncomfortably long. This can cause injury from a nail that catches on something or curls under and digs into her paw. You'd be surprised how many dogs end up in veterinary clinics with paw pain and other problems that could have been prevented with regular nail trims.

There are several other advantages to learning to trim your dog's nails at home. Not only can you consistently maintain the nails at a safe length, but you also avoid your dog's "car ride stress" and/or "vet or groomer visit stress." And since you know your pet better than anyone else, you can comfort her if you see signs of stress and take it slow when necessary, even doing a nail a day if that works best.

Finally, keeping your dog's nails trimmed doesn't have to be a chore you both dread — even if you've had a bad experience in the past. Pets who've developed a phobia about nail trims will obviously require some extra time and TLC, but with patience and a pup-friendly approach, most dogs can learn to tolerate regular nail trims.

Getting Your Dog Comfortable With Nail Trims

Dogs' paw pads are loaded with nerve receptors that help protect them when they walk and run; these receptors also make their paws more sensitive to handling than other parts of their body. That's why most dogs are uncomfortable when their human tries to "hold hands" with them — it's also the reason they object to having their paws held during nail trims.

The last thing you want to do is hold your pet down or with an overly firm grip, because it can increase his fear level, which can lead to a fight-or-flight response.

When I rescued my dog Rosco, I quickly realized he didn't like having his paws touched. I immediately started desensitizing him by petting him and incorporating paw touches into the petting. I would stroke his head, his body, and work my way to his paws. If the only time you touch your dog's feet is to trim his nails, he immediately knows what's coming when you touch his paws.

Another important thing to remember is that you can always go back and take a bit more off if you leave a nail too long, but you can't erase the pain memory if you cut one too close. If you create a painful experience for your dog during nail trims, he'll forever associate the clipper with "Ouch!"

With Rosco, I used food treats to create positivity around nail trims, and I also only trimmed one nail a day because he had a very low stress tolerance threshold, and nail trims were stressful for him. Instead of trying to "get it over with" all at once, I did one nail each day. It became such a quick and relatively pleasant daily experience for him that he didn't have a chance to get stressed out.

Choosing the Right Tools

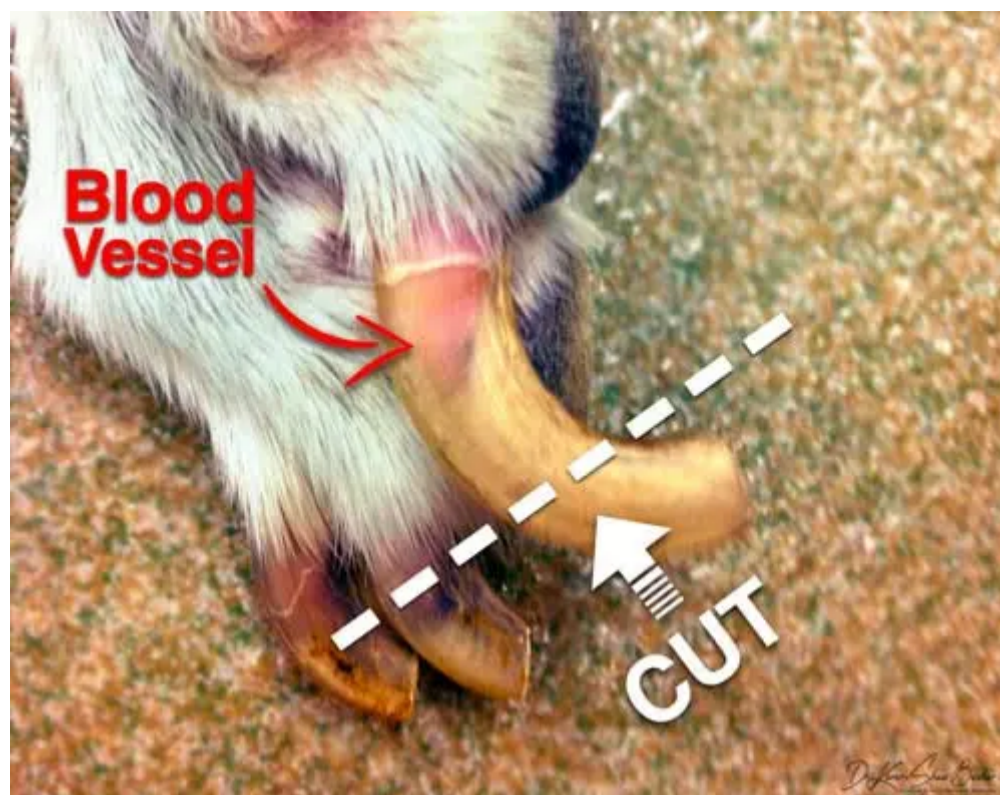
I used a nail trimmer with Rosco, but lots of pet parents use a Dremel battery-operated rotary grinding tool. It files nails down versus cutting them. Rosco didn't like the Dremel one bit, but many dogs are fine with it.

There's not a right or wrong tool for nail trims, so if your dog isn't bothered by a battery-operated tool, go for it. But if she's nervous about the vibration or noise, she's probably not a good candidate for the Dremel. If she's had a bad experience with a particular trimming tool, choose something different. It's important to read your dog's body language so you can use the tool that works best to create a low-stress nail trimming experience.

First Rule of Nail Trims: Clip Enough — but Not Too Much

Trying to figure out how far up to clip your dog's nails is one of the more unsettling aspects of nail trims for many pet parents. It isn't like trimming human nails, which can be taken all the way down to the fingertips. Dogs use their nails for traction, which may be why the quick of the nail isn't right at the skin line like ours is.

Many dogs have both white and dark nails, and dark ones are especially tricky because you can't really see the pinkish quick, which is the blood vessel inside the nail that nourishes it. Shine a small flashlight or penlight on dark nails so you can see the quick versus guessing how close you are to it.



You want to avoid clipping into the quick. In fact, you don't even want to get close to it. You only want to clip the white or dark ends of each nail.

Some nail trimmers come with a guard. You can flip up the guard and it will only allow you to take off a tiny amount of nail. To be on the super safe side, do very small snips — even if you have to do a half dozen or more for each nail — until you can see the quick inside the nail.

Don't Forget the Styptic Powder

One important thing to have on hand before you start trimming is styptic powder or quick stop in case you cut into the quick of the nail. You can buy styptic powder for pets at any big box pet store, or you can use human styptic powder. The key is to have it at your fingertips before you start clipping those nails.

If you hit the quick of your dog's nail, the amount of blood that tiny wound produces can be impressive. Not only might you panic, but so might your dog. You can end up with blood all over the place and the bleeding can be difficult to stop.

So if you (heaven forbid) trim into the quick and draw blood, have that styptic powder on hand. I use a wet Q-tip, put a bit of powder on the wound and hold it right up against the cut nail to stop the bleeding. Hopefully you'll never need to use it, but do have it available so neither you nor your dog needs to panic about a cut.

Sources and References

[PetMD](#)
