



NAIL TRIMS

Training your pet to tolerate nail trims can be a very rewarding process. At each stage of training, make sure that your pet is completely comfortable with each step before moving to the next part of the process.

Decide what position you and your pet will be in for the nail trim. This could be your pet standing while you sit on the floor, your pet standing in your lap, your pet sitting and offering each paw, or your pet lying on his or her side. Some positions are more difficult for pets than others, so keep that in mind when you start your training. The first part of training a nail trim is to get the pet to assume the position you want. You can use a piece of food to encourage your pet to get into the appropriate location. Give your pet the treat when he or she gets into the location. Once your pet is comfortable with the position, you can work on touching the paws.

Many animals are uncomfortable with their paws being touched. You will use a gradual method, paired with treats, to acclimate your pet to this part of the procedure. For some pets, you may find that he or she is too sensitive to even touch the feet to begin. Start with the back feet, which may pet mind less, and wave your hand around your pet's feet and give a small treat. Over the course of multiple, short sessions, you can gradually move closer and closer until you are able to touch your pet's feet.

When touching the feet, start with a single and a light, very short touch on the top of the foot. Use your marker word when your hand is touching your pet's foot. Over the course of the next few weeks, gradually extend the amount of time that you hold your hand on your pet's foot. If your pet shows signs of discomfort such as pulling the foot away, looking stiff or frozen, or growling, you have moved too fast, and you should work at the previous step until your pet is comfortable. Once your pet is comfortable with you touching the foot you can gradually hold the foot while your pet remains in position, then short movements, then holding individual toes. After your pet is comfortable with you handling the feet, you can add in the nail trimming tool.

The two most common ways to trim nails are with clippers (of varying types) and with a Dremel. Most cats do well with clippers while dogs may do well with either clippers or a Dremel. For dogs that have a long history of fighting nail trims using one method, you may consider training then for nail trims with the other tool. An example is a dog that runs when he or she even sees the clippers. That is a dog that you may want to re-train with the Dremel, which does not have as much of a negative association.

To train with the clippers, start by waving the clippers around the dog, mark, and give a treat. Once your pet is comfortable with the clippers, you can touch your pet's foot while moving the clippers in the vicinity of your pet. After your pet is comfortable at this stage, you can move the clippers closer and closer until you are able to tap the clippers against your pet's foot without a fearful response. Make sure that you are making and rewarding each successive step and do not move on to the next step without your pet being comfortable at the previous step. When your pet is comfortable with the clippers touching the foot, you can position the foot as if you are going to clip a nail (without clipping it), mark, and reward. Finally, you can clip a nail (and mark and reward for each nail).

A similar process is used for the Dremel, but before you get to the stage where you can Dremel the nails, you will need to acclimate your pet to the sound of the Dremel. This can be done by standing farther away from your pet, turning the Dremel on and off, giving the treat reward (by tossing it on the floor).

Gradually increase the length of time that you have the Dremel on before marking and rewarding. After your pet is comfortable with the sound, you can introduce the pet to the Dremel in a similar fashion to the introduction with the clippers. Some dogs are frightened of the vibration of the Dremel, so you may need to have the Dremel turned on and introduce it by putting the wrong end on the dog's foot so that he or she can feel the vibration. Don't forget to mark and reward!

For pets that don't have a bad history with the tools needed for nail trim, this is a process that can take as little as two weeks while training only a few minutes a day. If your pet has a history of struggling with nail trims, the process may take quite a bit longer. Make sure that the nails need to be trimmed during the training process your pet should be fully anesthetized so that you don't lose ground on your training.

It is a lot of work, but it can be very rewarding to be able to trim your pet's nails without a battle.