

Golden Health

The Kindest Cut?

by Kathy Burton

My dogs didn't think so. When the nail clippers came out, they offered as much resistance as any creature without opposing thumbs can, running upstairs if I was downstairs, down if I was up, into the study and under the desk like they were being pursued by the Hound of the Baskervilles.

In quizzing family and friends, I'd found that their dogs—big or small—pretty much behaved the same way. Many dogs HATE having their nails trimmed, to the point where a lot of owners throw up their hands and always have the vet or groomer do the job.

Some people, of course, have better luck: the show owners who grind the nail instead of cutting it, the owners who start their puppies off right with lots of handling (though not even this always works!), the owners of those rare dogs who are naturally so relaxed that almost nothing bothers them. And I so envied these people! And then ... one day I was trimming the pads of our rescue Golden's feet with scissors. Emma will let you do pretty much anything to her without a huge protest, but her squirming was tedious and time-consuming, so I grabbed a palm-sized, battery-operated clipper and started to run it (turned off) over her pads. Hmmm, no protest! Let's try it turned on. Still no protest! The noise did not bother her; the vibration did not bother her. Could it be that here was a candidate for nail grinding with a Dremel tool instead of the constant struggle with clippers?

Why Dremel?

One big advantage of "Dremeling," of course, is that you run less risk of causing the dog discomfort by crushing the nail or clipping into the quick (see "Clipper tips," page 5). And while our dogs may have a very short

memory for most things (say, commands such as "stay" and "no stealing the Thanksgiving turkey"), they never seem to forget a painful nail trim—hence the evaporation act when the clippers come out.

Once I realized that Emma might do well with nail grinding, I did a quick Google search and came up with a link from the Greater Pittsburg Golden Retriever Club website (<http://homepages.udayton.edu/~merenski/doberdown/dremel/dremel.html>). This led me to a piece written by a wonderful woman who has Dremeled her dogs' nails for years and has been generous enough to post the information online, complete with full step-by-step instructions, diagrams, and photos.

The article tells you just how to get your dog used to the Dremel. I followed the advice to the letter with Emma and discovered she was far more patient with grinding than she'd ever been with clippers. The biggest surprise, though, had to be my big, red male Golden, Bob, who had always required a two-person nail-cutting team: one to put him in a half-Nelson, the other to clip. Bob has taken to Dremeling, as well! I'm going slow with him, just as I did with Emma, but now it only takes one person to do the Golden nails in our household.

Not one to shy away from pushing my luck, I then approached our German Shepherd, Sam, who has never let anyone but a professional (our vet) touch his feet. No way! I promptly got a look that clearly said, "I'm no Golden Retriever, don't even think about using that thing on me." Oh well, two out of three dogs is not a bad conversion rate. We're happy, the Golden are happy—and we hear a lot less "click, click, click" when doggie paws are crossing our uncarpeted floors.



An unclipped nail.



The pretty one!

May I have this paw for grooming?

Sam's reaction got me thinking, though. Why ARE some dogs so much more sensitive than others when it comes to this nail-trimming thing? On doing further research, I discovered it's not so much having their nails touched that bothers them as having their paws gripped firmly. In the wild, having a foot pinned down puts an animal at risk of severe injury or worse; it's a matter of survival. Our house dogs, of course, don't have to worry about subsistence living in the forest, but some instincts die hard. In any case, this may explain why some dogs really resent having their feet touched—so for safety's sake, never try to clip or grind nails on an adult dog who shows a lot of resistance to it until you've got him comfortable with having his feet held.



With most dogs, this is accomplished one step at a time, with a treat reward at each successful step. To make it more enjoyable, try sitting with your dog and having someone lightly lift the paw as you give a treat (unsalted popcorn works well with a lot of Golden Retrievers). Then, touch one toe and give a treat; grasp one toe as you would if you were going to clip or Dremel it, and give a treat again. Repeat until your dog doesn't resist when you take her paw in your hand and lightly squeeze.

Clipper tips

If you prefer to stay with clipping, make sure the tool you use is the proper size (Med-Lg for most Golden Retrievers) and that it has a very sharp cutting blade. If it's been dulled by use, it will slightly crush the nail before cutting it, and that's very painful for the dog. This pain probably accounts more for a dog's resistance to nail-trimming than "quicking" the nail blood vessel and attendant nerve. I've actually hit the quick

a couple of times and didn't realize it until I saw the blood. The dog did not scream in pain or even pull the paw away; I applied a drop of Kwik-Stop Styptic Gel to stop the bleeding and all was well with the dog. (I, however, had to go lie down for a moment—felt a bit faint.) After clipping, it is nice to then smooth off any rough places with a professional groomer's dog nail file. You can also cut the nail back as far as you safely can using scissor or guillotine-type clippers, then use a Dremel to shape the nail to make the quick recede farther for the next time foot-grooming is due. This seems to work especially well with dogs who haven't had a pedicure in a really long time, resulting in long, talon-like nails. If you're a puppy owner, make a point of starting nail-trimming early on, using small-size clippers. Hold off on nail grinding until the dog is old enough to have a hard shell formed around the fleshy part of the nail.

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Just do it!

When you keep your dog's feet well-groomed and his nails nice and short, you can avoid some of the everyday hazards any active dog faces—such as knee injury due to slipping on grass if pads are not properly trimmed, or painful broken nails requiring a trip to the vet's office. But whether you clip or grind, whether you do the job yourself or have a vet or professional groomer do it for you, the important point is DO IT! Your dog will be more comfortable and healthy with nicely trimmed feet—and he'll have a neat, pretty "cat-paw" look that you can be proud of.

