

Clipping a Fussy Dog's Nails

When a dog refuses to have nails clipped, use tools and help from a partner.

By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG

Q. I have a female Cockapoo (Cocker Spaniel-Poodle mix). She hates having anything done to her feet so I can't cut her nails. I actually took some grooming classes and whenever I even get the clipper near her nails, she bites. Any suggestions? It's pretty bad when I can't even cut my own dog's nails.

A. Not being able to cut your dog's nails is nothing to be ashamed of! Some dogs develop a "foot fetish," pitching a fit if we touch their precious paws. They take it as an act of dominance on our part and literally fight us tooth and nail! I applaud you for taking grooming classes to take better care of your dog. As a Cocker Spaniel-Poodle mix, her coat will require regular brushing from the skin out twice a week to keep mats from forming, allowing her to be styled in a cute trim without shaving her down to the skin., the only course if she becomes badly matted.

The perils of the untouchable paws can usually be avoided if you desensitize your pet to having her feet handled and nails "tipped" in early puppyhood. I realize this is hindsight in your situation. Your little princess has learned that acting like she has the lead role in "The Exorcist" results in having you abandon the nail-cutting.

At this point, you will need three things to accomplish your mission: a grooming table with a post and nylon noose to keep her in place, a muzzle made of sturdy nylon that fits correctly over her jaws, and a partner to help hold her.

Once she is muzzled on the table, have your helper hold her head, being careful not to hurt her or interfere with her breathing, while you turn your back to her hind end and lift each paw, not too high and not twisting the leg. Clip only the curved tip of each nail and have styptic powder on hand in case you accidentally nick the "quick," the vein inside each nail. You should be using your own body to stabilize her as you work.

Next, with your helper moving to the side and placing one arm under her belly and the other on the chest beneath her chin, lift each front paw as if you are shoeing a horse and repeat the process. Give her lots of praise and a treat if you succeed. The worst-case scenario for dogs like this is to have the vet put them under anesthesia every time they need a pedicure, so I hope you can either do this yourself or find a groomer with the skill and experience to do it for you.