

Grooming a Golden Retriever's Paws

A dog groomer offers tips for grooming a Golden Retriever's paws and pads.

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Q. I groom my Golden Retriever Chance's paws and pads myself and wonder if I'm doing it properly. I have a small pair of trimmers to clip the hair underneath his pads, between his toes, and between the toes on top of the foot. I trim down as close as the clippers will allow, making sure I don't clip into Chance's skin. I then clip his nails as close to the quick as I dare, so as not to induce bleeding. He's quite content with me doing this as I condition him to let me have his paws by massaging them while we watch TV on the couch. It doesn't hurt that he knows he'll have a special treat that he only gets when he has his paws done and no other time.

The clipper I use is actually a mustache/beard trimmer and I don't use any guards on it so you can imagine how close it is. I'd like to know if I am clipping his feet correctly, or if I'm overdoing it. Do I actually have to clip both sides (top and bottom) of his feet or just the hair that extends down onto the ground between his toes and then just clip the extra length between the toes that extends up between the toes?

Also, is there any difference in clippers sold for human hair and clippers sold for dogs?

A. I think the hallmark of a good Golden Retriever grooming is the appearance of the feet. The pads should be shaved out to remove hair and debris and if you are using a beard trimmer, you are correct in using a very light touch. I use a #10 blade myself but many groomers use a battery-powered cordless clipper that shaves as close as yours does or a #30 blade on their electric clippers. It's a matter of preference.

If you are using clippers on top of his feet, I think you may be overdoing it. Instead, back-brush the tufts that stick up between the toes – I call them Golden bedroom slippers – to make them stand up, using thinning shears rather than your clipper to remove them. Next, gently lifting the foot up towards you as if you are shoeing a horse, trim the foot's outline with scissors to make it look neat. You should not cut the hair on top of the foot so close that you expose the toes and nails. Your goal is a natural-looking foot.

We also trim the hocks on the rear legs with thinning shears if they are long and shaggy and use a longer blade to neaten the same area on the front legs, beneath the pad-like protuberance on the back of the ankle known as the "stopper," being careful not to clip those lovely leg feathers in the process.

I applaud you for desensitizing Chance to foot and nail trims by handling his paws and rewarding him for his cooperation. I wish every dog owner did that when their pet was a puppy.

There isn't much difference between clippers for pets or those sold for humans. When your blades get dull or if the teeth get broken, be sure to replace them so you won't nick your handsome boy's skin as you tidy him up.

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