

## Hard as Nails

### **Training a reluctant dog to become accustomed to regular nail trimming.**

*By Kathy Salzberg, NCMG*

**Q.** My Bichon Frisé just turned 3 years old and we have had her for two months now. She is re-homed and is fantastic in every area except for her nails being clipped. Because she is so averse to this, I have not been able to do them. She cries greatly when I attempt to, as if I am really hurting her, and also pulls and moves to resist. What can be done in such a case, and are there better nail clippers — style or brand — for the Bichon breed in particular?

**A.** Your Bichon is being quite dramatic — and it's working for her! When she throws a hissy fit, you stop trying to cut her nails. She may be averse to this procedure because in the past someone really did hurt her when they clipped her nails. Elephants are not the only animals that have long memories!

If her previous owner cut her nails too short and nicked the quick — the vein inside each nail that bleeds and hurts when it's cut — she will remember and do her darndest to make sure it doesn't happen again. However, your dog needs to get over it because her nails need to be trimmed regularly so they won't become overgrown, becoming prone to painful breakage or deforming her pretty little paws.

You need to learn to trim her nails without nicking the quick. If they are white, you can see the pink area, and that is the vein that is sensitive because of the nerve inside. Initially, you just want to remove the tip, the hollow part of the nail that has no nerve or feeling, so you will not hurt her.

When you gain more experience and confidence, you can take off a bit more. For starters, I would recommend enlisting the aid of a partner and putting your doggie diva up on a table where she will have less control than she would on the floor.

With your helper holding her head — not using a choke hold, but just enough pressure to control her — back up to the table at her hind end, supporting her body with your own, and lift her paw so that you are looking at its underside, then spread the toes gently and just cut the tip of each nail.

If your dog screams, as she probably will, say “No” in a firm tone of voice and keep going. The front paws are a bit more difficult, but with your partner holding her head, lift each one gently, again looking at the underside, and repeat the procedure. Reward her with lots of praise and some freeze-dried liver once you are done. While your dog is getting used to this procedure, I would trim her nails every two weeks.

I prefer the small pliers-type nail trimmers for a dog her size because they do the job quickly and are easier to manage than the guillotine type. The newer battery-powered rotary trimmers take a bit more time and cooperation on the dog's part, so I would stick to the old standby for your nervous little Bichon.

Even with the most experienced groomer, accidents will happen, so keep some styptic powder on hand to dab a nail that is cut too short and instantly stop the bleeding. When your nail cutters start to dull, replace them immediately.

The worst-case scenario is that your dog gets you so stressed out that you can't do this, in which case you could take her to a professional groomer who does this sort of thing daily. The cost is minimal — \$10 to \$15 is the going rate at my salon — and we do it without an appointment while you wait. When you have your dog professionally groomed, her nails will also be trimmed.