

Trimming a Miniature Pinscher's Nails

This breed does not appreciate a pedicure.

By Kathy Salzberg NCMG

Q. I have a Miniature Pinscher that hates to get his nails clipped. Pet store clerks have told me to use a file on his nails since they are so small. If I walk my dog daily, will that keep his nails short enough?

A. Dogs that walk on hard, abrasive surfaces will wear their nails down, notably those living in a city environment, but not many dogs in my clientele walk on pavement frequently enough that they don't need trimming, either by their owners, the groomer or a veterinary technician. I am not surprised to hear that your little Min Pin hates having his nails clipped. Rare indeed is the Min Pin who doesn't object to a pedicure, sometimes in a highly dramatic way!

If yours doesn't object to having his nails filed instead of clipped, get a package of large emery boards at a beauty supply store and use them frequently. If you do it on a weekly basis, his nails will stay nice and short, keeping his feet neat and tight in the process. Overgrown nails on any breed can make walking difficult; they can also break and cause pain and infection or even deform the paws. For your particular pet, they could disrupt his unique high-stepping gait, a trademark of this spirited and feisty breed known as the "King of the Toys."

With his black and rust coloring, cropped ears, and docked tail, he may look like a Doberman Pinscher, but he's not a downsized Dobie. Development of the Miniature Pinscher breed began in 1895 when Germany's Pinscher Klub was formed and the original breed standard established. Its smooth shiny coat comes in several colors and combinations: red, stag red (red with black hairs), black with rust markings, and chocolate with tan.

Originally bred as a barnyard ratter, this dog stands only 10 to 12 ½ inches tall but thinks he's big, making him a great watchdog and spunky family member. A virtually wash-and-wear breed, its grooming entails a quick massage with a rubber curry and a face wash with a damp towel to keep it looking sleek.

If you feel the nails require clipping and your little friend pitches a fit, I recommend the easy way out—taking him to the groomer for a quick trim. It's relatively inexpensive, usually around ten dollars, and the groomer will do it in a few minutes while you wait. In the salon, we have the advantage of placing the dog on the table with a grooming loop around its neck. The loop should be tight enough to prevent the dog from writhing and jumping but slack enough to allow him to breathe easily and stand comfortably. We usually have other people available to help us, an invaluable second pair of hands to comfort and control the dog so we can get the job done quickly. For both the safety of the pet and groomer, we have nylon muzzles of every size available as well.

On a toy dog like yours, we use a small pliers type set of nail clippers. Starting with the rear nails, my back toward the dog's rear end and using my body to support and control the pet, I lift each paw gently while I "tip" each nail, keeping the paws as low to the table as possible to avoid injury and minimize the wiggle factor. The rear nails are shorter than the front ones because dogs use them to "push off" when they run and jump, as natural to your little pet as breathing. Because Min Pins generally have black nails, you won't be able to see the "quick," the pink vein inside the nail, visible when working on a white-nailed pet. We keep a small jar of styptic powder on hand to instantly stop the bleeding if we should accidentally cut too close and nick this blood vessel. You should have it at home if you plan to trim the nails yourself.

After we tip each nail, removing the hooked portion if present, we may make a second cut to get them shorter. Cutting them as short as possible allows the quick to retract so each subsequent trimming will take them back a bit more. Once freshly cut, the inside of a dog's nail appears similar to the rings of a cut tree section, the darker black circle in the middle looking like a bull's-eye. As we shave thin layers, that dark center of the nail bed, the demarcation line of the quick, grows in size. When it covers most of the nail bed, we have reached the point where it's as close as we can go without nicking the quick.

Once you undertake this procedure, it's advisable to complete the job. If the dog learns that his actions can make you abort the mission, it will reinforce objectionable behavior. One way to prevent an adverse attitude to nail clipping is to desensitize the dog by handling his paws and trimming its nails from early puppyhood. If you succeed in mastering this job with your little dynamo, finish up the session with lots of loving praise and a tasty treat.