

Pedicure Please: 3 Steps To Dog Nail Trimming Or Grooming Success At Home!

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG One of the most difficult jobs for most dog owners is trying to cut their dog's nails. It's so difficult that a lot of pet owners end up taking their dogs to a Veterinarian or to a Groomer to get the job done professionally. But all that ends today. Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog. And in my last podcast, episode number 106, I spoke about the topic of consent.

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And I asked the question if anybody would like to know how I go about shaping my dogs to love to have their nails cut. And there were almost a hundred comments on my YouTube channel asking yes; I would really like to know. And that's what this episode is all about. It is the contents of a program that you will find on my website for \$50. It's called [Your Dog's Pedicure Please Program](#).

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Now, depending on when you're listening to this, you might [find that program for \\$19.97](#) because it's brand new. But because you're listening to this episode, I'm going to share how you work through it right here on today's podcast. Why, you may ask? Because my goal is to help all dog owners to help their dogs have their best life possible. And I don't think that that needs to have a boundary of your finances.

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And so today, I'm going to take you through the step-by-step that are in that program so that many of you will go on and be able to shape your dogs to give you consent to cut their nails because they're going to want it. All dogs will fall into one of five categories when it comes to nail trimming. Some dogs may be absolutely terrified like they're so over threshold, they are fearful, they're full-on fight or flight. And those dogs would have to be medicated to have their nails cut. So incredibly frightened.

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There are dogs who just plain hate it. "You know what? I'm going to do everything in my power to avoid it. I'm going to fight you every moment that you're going to be trying to cut my nails because I flat out hate it." Then there's the third grouping of dogs. Those are the dogs that just tolerated it. That they go, "Okay. I know I have to do what I'm told; otherwise, you're going to X. So, therefore, I'm just going to tolerate what you're doing to me right now."

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And then there are some dogs who accept it. "Yeah, I actually like it a little bit. Yeah, you know, it's nail trimming time. It's a good time." And then we go into the final category, and it is a category without a lot of dogs; they love having their nails done.

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They hear the Dremel, or they see you getting the nail trimmers out, and they start spinning and getting excited because they know it's nail trimming time, and they can't wait for that to happen. Very few dogs are in that category.



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But after today, I'm hoping many more are going to ascend through the ranks to move up to at least accept and maybe even love having their nails done. Several years ago, I gave a workshop here at my facility and invited a friend of mine, [Dr. Leslie Woodcock, to give a presentation](#) to the group on the importance of your dog's nail length. And why it was critically important to not only your dog's immediate health but to their longevity that you keep your dog's nails trimmed.

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What is trimmed? You shouldn't be able to hear your dogs on a tile floor. If you can hear click, click, click, your dog's nails are too long. That is a great indicator of how short your dog's nails should be. And Dr. Leslie Woodcock, she at the time owned a rehab veterinarian clinic. She has since retired, but she was well-known in the sports world because she traveled overseas with the Canadian World Team.

She was a chiropractor. She specialized in rehabilitation from sports injuries to surgeries, but she was really well-known for her care of geriatrics. And there is where she really got crazy about sharing the importance of everybody cutting their dog's nails. Those dogs not only felt better, but they also live longer.

She gave us an example of a geriatric dog that came into her clinic that couldn't walk up a flight of stairs. And after getting the dog's nails back to an appropriate length, guess what, the dog once again could go upstairs to bed every night. Dr. Woodcock shared with us that it's actually about your dog's postures.

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Now imagine how a dog should stand. Their pads should hit the ground. And then their elbows go above that, and then their shoulders are in their back, and it would be their pads and their hocks and their knees. Now with the nails long, it changes the angle of the dog's foot so that the pressure isn't felt true on their pads or what Dr. Leslie talked about was the dog doesn't know where the gravitational pull happens.

They don't know where down is, and they don't know where the horizon is for sure. Because the length of the nails is putting stress on the dog's paws, and the angle of their paws is putting more stress on the dog's joints. And that's why things start breaking down. Think about if your nails were a little bit longer and you were wearing your shoes, and your nails were hitting the end of the shoe. Well, that's going to cause pain in the nail beds, and that's what happens to our dogs.

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Geriatric dogs, you'll see them; Dr. Leslie calls it a 'goat on a rock' where the dog's four paws kind of gravitate to the center. And if you get those dog's nails done regularly so that you can never hear them clicking on the floor, you'll find that your geriatric dogs are more inclined to put their legs underneath them. Now, those of you with sporting dogs are going to say, "Oh no, Susan. I need my dogs to be able to grip. I want my dog's nails long so they can grip."

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Now think of a woman you've seen with really long fake nails, you know, those super long ones. Do you think there's more strength in those nails at that length, or the strength happens right near the fingertips? And our dogs are the same. The longer the nails, the less control they have over the nails that are bending and the more pressure that's putting back in their nail beds.



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Dogs can retract their nails when they're digging in and running on surfaces. So, keeping them so that you can't hear them click on the floor doesn't mean they can't use them when they're digging in and running. It's a myth that a lot of sports owners hang on to, and what's happening is when your dog is running with these excessively long nails, you are putting strain on all of their joints. Not a great idea. And it could be why you see a lot of shoulder injuries, elbow injuries, or knee and hock injuries in dogs because their nails are just too long.

So, a question for you, how often do you cut your dog's nails, and what category would your dog go into? Would they be dogs that hate getting their nails done? They tolerate it. They love it. Which one? Or are they terrified? For me, cutting my dog's nails changed back in the nineties with a Jack Russell Terrier I had named Twister.

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Now all of my dogs, I asked for consent to get their nails cut. Back then, I would sit on the floor, I was a little bit younger, and I would have the dogs come and lay on my lap and present their belly so I could just trim all the nails on four paws. Now Twister became more and more reluctant to come and take her turn.

And then finally one day she all out just went and hid under my bed. That's when I knew we have moved from probably tolerate to "Come on; I'm hating this." And it was a wake-up call for me. I want my dogs to never look at me with fear. I don't want my dogs to ever hate something that I have to do to them regularly.

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And so, I started looking at what I could do to change all that. And that was the beginning of [Your Dog's Pedicure Please Program](#). Not only does it save stress on the dog because they don't hate getting their nails done, or they don't have to be packaged up and sent to the groomers or to the Veterinarian to get their nails done. It actually helps you to create a better relationship with your dog because you're rehearsing good dog training principles.

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And the third reason why everybody loves this program is the potential to have your dog live life to the fullest and the longest. Not only adding years to your dog's life but the quality of years because of the mobility the dog has because of the shortness of the nails that they've lived with their entire life. And finally, it's saving you money. If you're having to get your dogs' either medicated to get their nails done or sending them off to get them done professionally. I mean, most professionals will charge 10 to 25 dollars for every single nail trim. In a year, think about much money did you save just by listening to this podcast and learning how to trim your dog's nails by yourself?

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Okay, so let's get started. *Your Dog's Pedicure Please Program* is actually a three-module program. There are three distinct stages. The first one is establishing CERs. Now, if you've been listening to this program, you know that a CER is a conditioned emotional response. Twister showed me she had a conditioned emotional response to me picking up the Dremel and the nail trimmers.

She went and hid under the bed. "I don't like this." "I don't want to be near this." "I don't want this to happen to me." We want to create CERs so that your dog looks at nail trimming differently. "Oh, you're getting the nail trimmers out. Okay, well, that's good." That's module one.



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Module two is creating the game on position. The position that your dog is going to adopt any time you want to trim their nails, or this works great for those of you who want to brush your dog's teeth, or you want to clean your dog's ears, or you want your dog to accept being examined by a Veterinarian. What we're doing is establishing a way that your dog can communicate, "I'm okay with what's going on. You can keep going." And they might even be saying, "I actually like what's going on! Come on. Let's keep going."

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And the third module is the actual cutting of the nails, the procedure. But that is a long way away from where we are today. So, let's jump in and talk about module number one. Any dog that's had their nails trimmed has a conditioned emotional response to the experience. It may be obvious to you what that is, but we want to work on it being obvious that it is something amazing. We need to **establish a CER** to the sight of the tools you're going to be using to trim your dog's nails.

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Be it nail trimmers or Dremels, whatever you choose. We need to establish a CER to the sound of the nail trimmers, either the sound of a nail being trimmed, or the sound of a Dremel being turned on. We need to establish a CER for you picking up and holding their paws. We need to establish a CER to you manipulating and isolating one single toe that's going to be worked on.

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And so, module number one is just that we are not cutting toenails; we are getting nowhere near cutting toenails. So how do we establish the CER? I call this a three-by-three approach. What we're going to do it, you'll need three different containers, like a duffel bag, a box, something like that, different containers to hold your tools. We're going to condition these in at least three different rooms, and you're going to have three non-tools in your bag.

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For example, I may put some expo markers, a brush, and maybe a hairbrush in my bag along with my Dremel. And I'm going to go into room number one, my dog's going to be in there, and there's going to be some really tasty treats in the little container in my bag. And what I'm going to do is I'm going to pull out each one of these items and show it to my dog. I'm not going to say anything or do anything. My dog is going to go, "You're an idiot. Why are you doing this to me?" And then you're going to show them the Dremel. But when you bring that out at the same time, you're going to be holding a treat.

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You're going to take that treat, feed your dog and start all over again. Move around the room and just keep presenting different things that are meaningless every once in a while; you can present the Dremel or, if you're going to be trimming your dog's nails, the nail trimmers. Now, if you're used to trimming your dog's nails with nail trimmers, and they hate it, I strongly recommend you going to the Dremel.

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I personally love a Dremel because it's so much easier to get short nails without the risk of cutting a quick. I'm going to leave a [link in the show notes here to the Dremel that I love](#). I have a big Dremel that I love, but I also have a really quiet and inexpensive Dremel that most dogs are really okay with.



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So dremeling is something that I would encourage you all to try to move towards because dogs really seem to accept dremeling more than anything else. So, your three-by-three CERs. Now you can put in more objects than three so that you can pull out different ones, but when you're going to pull out the Dremel, you're going to be picking up a cookie and pulling it out and then presenting the cookie to the dog. Move to a minimum of three different rooms.

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It could take you maybe 60 seconds to do this, and you might do it 10 or 20 times a day. You can do it five times at once, you know, five times at bedtime, five times in the morning, whenever you have more time. That's all you're going to do.

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You're going to do this until your dog looks like Zeus. Now, this is a little video clip of one of our online students Kristen. She sent it to me as a DM on [Instagram](#). She goes, "you won't believe the difference." So, you'll see Zeus before she started doing the three-by-three CERs and Zeus after he's like, "Okay, come on, pull out the Dremel. I'm looking for the Dremel. This is exciting."

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When you've got to that stage, then you're going to add the next layer, which is a CER, to the sound. So, when you pull it out, you're going to turn it on. You're going to go through the whole thing again. The next stage won't take you very long at all. Now you're ready for layer number two, stage number two, and that is the **'game on' position**.

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That's the position your dog's going to adopt to tell you, "I'm ready for my pedicure, please." Now I like to shape my dog to lay flat out on their side. It's just so darn easy for that dog to give me clear communication. If her head comes up, she's saying, "Uh, I don't know what you're doing, and I don't want you to go any further." And I wait until her head comes down, and if her head doesn't come down within a few seconds, I say, "Okay, come on, get off. We're done. And we'll come back to this another time." Or I might say, "Do you want to try it again?" and we'll work at it again. So first, we have to shape the dog to lie flat out on their side. Do this on a dog bed or on a cushion where the dog is more comfortable.

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Refer to my YouTube videos where I teach [how I use a target stick](#) because once you get your dog into a down most dogs are going to go into a sphinx down where their chest, their sternum, is on the ground. They're not lying flat out on their side. And so, I'll use a target stick and bring it around to their shoulders to get them to make that flopping action.

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You could probably do it with a cookie lure, but we're moving to a step where we're going to be using [ItsYerChoice](#), so a cookie lure might not be a great idea. So, we want to establish the down on the side with their head down. You could use, you know, a little piece of paper if you want to as a target for the dog, you have to put your head here, you know, go a little crazy - but just - the dog generally with their head down. I'm going to warn you, though dogs are really brilliant at getting their reinforcement.



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And so, they're going to want to put their head closer to your hand. You want to be very clear when the dog's lying on that dog bed, I'm going to feed in the furthest corner above the dog's head. I'm not going to allow the dog's head to gravitate towards me. Super important.

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Now you're going to play your ItsYerChoice game. If you've never played ItsYerChoice, I'm going to [leave you a link](#) in the show notes here. So, I'm going to pick up a cookie and if my dog lifts her head off the ground. I'm going to wait till it comes down, and then I'm going to go closer. Lifts her head up. I'm going to put it back, and now, obviously, I'm going to start really close to her face. I want her to leave her head down until I can get the cookies to her mouth. And then I'll just feed, feed, feed. Give her a release. She can come up, and we'll start at this again.

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I want to gradually build duration until she understands when I tell her to get up and relax, she will. I say flop; you can say whatever you want, "get up and flop," that they just flopped to their side, and they keep their head down. Head comes up, and most dogs put their head up because they were like, "Where's the treat? Is it coming faster? We're building a CER to this position, aren't we?"

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They love it. When you've got a dog that's completely comfortable, then you're going to do things like stroke their body. Do they put their head up? Then you're going to stop your stroke midway through and wait until they put their head down. Continue with the stroking. Then you're going to work at picking up a paw. And if they put their head up again, you're going to drop the paw.

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You want to work towards being able to manipulate each paw individually. I will tell you. You would think the dogs are happier with having the paw on top worked on? They're not. My history has shown dogs prefer you're working on the paw that's underneath. And so, you have to change sides to get to that other side. Now you could keep working hard so that they don't care, or you don't have to go to that level of conditioning. We're getting a dog who's laying on their side, that you can manipulate any part of their body. Look in their ears, lift up their lips to see their teeth, touch their teeth, working towards brushing their teeth, right?

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And once you've got your dog who's completely content with that, they're giving you consent "Yes, please", then you're going to bring in part one to part two. You're going to then lift up a Dremel and turn it on. Does the head still come up? Turn it off, put it down until you can turn it on, and the head stays up. Eventually, we're going to take the button of the Dremel and touch the dog on the shoulder where we were patting previously. Just so they can feel the vibration. We're creating a CER to the vibration.

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You're going to keep moving slowly at the dog's pace. The dog's giving you consent for this until you can pick up a paw and put the button on the paws, like a massage unit. You're just massaging their paw with the button. The grinder is going nowhere near. I like to turn the Dremel up really fast, far, far, far faster than I will ever cut a dog's nails. Because if they can tolerate the whizzing whirling sound at high speed when I turn it down to cut their nails, it's going to be like, "Oh yeah, that's a relief."



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You are going to have to build up slowly with their head giving you consent to do so. Now for those of you who want to cut nails, get your nail trimmer, get some raw spaghetti and just cut the spaghetti with the nail trimmers. It kind of sounds like the sound of nails being trimmed. And if the dog lifts her head up, you've got to stop. They're saying, "I don't like that sound. It reminds me of something that I didn't like."

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You're going to keep moving on with this really slowly until you can lift up their paws, you can look in their ears, you can do anything you want. You can massage with the Dremel. Any part of the body, now you're ready to move on to step three.

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Step three is all about **trimming the dog's nails**. Now I personally like to start with a Dremel. You can; if you don't have a Dremel, you can start with nail trimmer. But you're going to do it as if you're shaving ice. You're going to bring the trimmer near the nails and just shave. You don't want to trim anything. You're shaving ice.

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You want to refer to [the video that I spoke about](#) at the beginning of this podcast, where Dr. Leslie Woodcock talked about the exact way you should be cutting nails, the alternative cut angle, which is so important that you get because it helps to recess that quick. So that nail trimming gets easier and easier every time you do it.

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When you're moving into stage three, I will tell you; you will get a regression with some dogs. They're going to tell you how fast you can move. And if they lift their head up, or they exit stage left, you've moved too far too fast. Take a step back and go back to just conditioning.

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Eventually, your dog is going to let you touch the Dremel to their toenails or take a little trimming. And then you're going to go back to just making the noise with the Dremel and massaging their body and manipulating their paws and their pads and their body.

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You're not going to keep cutting, "Oh, you let me cut one. I'm going to cut, cut, cut, cut, cut." You're just going to take this super slowly. Now, for those of you who say, "Sounds like this is going to take a while." That length of time depends on what stage of love or hate your dog is in right now. For most dogs, it's going to take several weeks, maybe even a couple of months, to move through all of these progressions.

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So, you're going to say, "Well Susan, what am I going to do in the meantime?" What I recommend you do is one of two things. You can [condition your dog to a lick pad](#). That is where you just smear some tasty treats on a pad, stick it to the wall, and when your dog's eating the pad, you're just going to do all the conditioning of touching and doing everything. Eventually, trimming those nails super-fast while they're licking at the food, while they are distracted.



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Some dogs won't let you do that. You may then need to go to a scratchboard. Now you can google this and find it on YouTube on how to build a scratchboard. It's all in the *Pedicure Please Program*, how to build and use a scratch board, you just shape your dogs to scratch their pads on that board. It's sandpaper that you can get your dog's nails sanded down while you're working on helping them to say, "Can I have my pedicure, please?"

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So that's it. You've got the entire program. All of the key parts of each stage. For many people, you will be able to cut your dog's nails. For those of you who want a deeper dive, yes, we have [Your Pedicure Please Program](#). I'll put a link in the show notes. It's available on our website. Right now, you can get it for an introductory price of just under 20 bucks. That's the price that some people pay for a nail trim at the Groomers or the Veterinarians.

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It's a \$20 investment to have your dogs say, "You and I, we're good. I don't mind what you're doing to me." Because let's face it, this is scary, but it isn't necessarily going to hurt your dog. A little discomfort, but if you do it right, there isn't pain, and your dog is going to be a hundred percent on board with it.

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That's the first step to having your dog have that deeper trust so that you two can do anything together that's required for any kind of husbandry behavior. That's a phenomenal place to be where your dog is saying, "Can I have my pedicure, please?" I'll see you next time here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Get Your Dog's Pedicure Please Program](#)

[Podcast Episode 106: Consent In Dog Training: The Misuse, Misunderstanding And Misapplication](#)

[Video Blog with Dr. Leslie Woodcock: Cutting Your Dog's Nails: How Important Is It Really?](#)

[Susan on Instagram](#)

[YouTube Video: Target Stick Training Part One](#)

[YouTube Video: Target Stick Training Part Two](#)

[Learn the ItsYerChoice Game](#)

[Susan's Favorite Dremel and Nail Clipping Equipment](#)

[Video Blog: Help! My Dog Hates His Nails Cut ... What Do I Do?](#)

[Video Blog: Proactive Conditioning for Dog Nail Trimming Success](#)

[Video Blog: This! One is About Conditioning the Dremel for Puppy Nails](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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