

A Nail Strategy

Talk to owners of a hairy breed and sooner or later they will disrespect your Weimaraner's grooming with a, flippant, "...all you have to do are the teeth and nails." Right, it sounds easy until you have to do nails on a Weimaraner who is resisting. Yes, those nails need attention but what to do? Basically, you can deal with the nail situation with two options – over power with brute force or train your Weimaraner to tolerate the process. Note that I don't use the words "like," "Weimaraner" and "nails" in the same sentence. I've never had a Weimaraner who liked having their nails done, but I've had many who tolerated the process.

How do you build up tolerance? There's no fast way to get to that goal. First, you need to get your dog used to having its feet touched and manipulated since many dogs dislike having their feet touched. Start with a few simple strokes and praise your dog when they allow you to touch their feet and eventually pick up the paws. Do this a couple of times in the course of a day until your dog accepts your behavior. This may take only a day or it may take longer. Reward a cooperative behavior with praise and treats.

Once your dog accepts the handling, it's time to introduce them to the instrument that will be shortening the nails. Your basic choices are clipping or grinding. My personal preference is to grind the nails rather than clip. (Clipping seems to pinch and there's a greater possibility of cutting too close to the blood vessels in the nail and cause bleeding.)

There are a number of brands of small rotary hand tools on the market and my own preference is a rechargeable cordless version that eliminates the possibility of getting tangled in the cord. Again, introduce the equipment slowly. Show the dog the turned off grinder from a distance. Encourage your dog to come over and sniff the equipment. Next, take the grinder a good distance from your dog and turn it on. Get your dog accustomed to the sound. Repeat this introduction a few

times a day till the sound is no longer novel to your dog. Slowly decrease the distance from the grinder and reward your dog's acceptance till the sound is associated with treats and praise.

When your dog has a positive reaction to the sound, it's time to desensitize the dog to the vibration. I take the grinder in my hand and while securely holding the grinder, use the back of my hand to lightly stroke the dog's back. Repeat this process till the vibration is not a surprise. Praise and treat accepting behavior.

Only at this point do you consider touching the grinder to a nail. You'll be using a small, sandpaper covered drum to grind the nails – never use a grinding stone.

Have your dog in a small space so you can control movement. Having a second person to steady up your dog is helpful but not essential. The first time you try this you only touch the nail, pull away and give a special treat. Don't do more than this on a first attempt. Later try again, building up the cooperation. It may take a few days to accomplish this training but don't rush. Make your first goal to do a single nail and slowly build up from there.

All this slow, methodical training will eventually pay off. As tempting as it is to simply get in there and grind away, the best approach is to condition tolerance and reward desired behavior.

While I've never had dogs clamoring to be first to have their nails done, I do have resigned tolerance and joyful release for their expected treat.

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