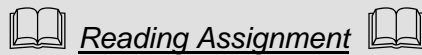


Trimming a Dog's Paw Pads



The All-Breed Dog Grooming Guide, Page 18: "Cleaning Between the Pads of the Feet"

The Mutt Styling Guide, Pages 71-81: Study feet styles



The pads of a dog's feet require maintenance in order to keep them clean, healthy, visually-pleasing, and comfortable for the canine.

Your canine clients' feet must be maintained for several reasons. First of all, dogs often get dirt, mud, and various types of debris caught in their **interdigital** hair (between the pads of their toes). Due to the friction that occurs from a dog walking on his paw pads, the hair in there tends to mat, which can be extremely uncomfortable for the dog. The groomer must remove the hair, dirt, debris, and mats in order to make the dog more comfortable and contented.

In the winter time, balls of ice can cling to the interdigital hair, causing the dog great discomfort; in the summertime, mud and dirt customarily become lodged in this hair. Burrs, foxtails, gravel, feces, thorns, tar, and gum are all examples of the debris that can get intertwined in this fur.^{*} If not removed, they can become matted into the hair, and this will hurt the dog's toes and feet as he walks. The professional groomer is responsible for inspecting the interdigital hair and removing anything abnormal that is present.

Secondly, the dirt and debris that becomes lodged in the hair in between the toes can be tracked into the owner's home; removing this hair keeps the owner's home cleaner, which the owner will greatly appreciate. Additionally, the long hair between the toes of longhaired dogs can cause the dog to slip on surfaces such as linoleum, tile, or wood flooring while he is traveling through the house, so removal of this hair will give him better traction. Of course, this mainly applies to dogs that live outdoors or are combination indoor/outdoor dogs. Those canines that live primarily or completely indoors do not necessarily need the hair between their toes to be removed, unless it is matted. However, it is still customary to clip off this hair.

^{*} Verplank, Melissa: Notes from the Grooming Table. White Dog Enterprises: MI. 2004.

Finally, caring for the feet makes them look aesthetically pleasing, and there are specific styles that are standard for each breed's feet. You can study these specifics in your textbooks, *The All-Breed Dog Grooming Guide* by Sam Kohl and *The Mutt Styling Guide* by Chrissy Thompson. A dog with well-groomed paws and paw pads along with a well-groomed body and face looks visually appealing.*



The breeds of dogs that require removal of the interdigital hair are those with undercoats, long hair such as the Golden Retriever, or silky coats such as the Irish Setter. Those dogs that have long hair on the back side of their legs usually have long hair between their toes, too. Even some breeds with short coats have hair sprouting from their paw pads. Clipping out the hair from the paw pads and trimming the hair on the foot itself show off the natural bone structure of the foot and prevent matting from forming and debris from sticking to the hair.

Clipping the hair out from in between a dog's toe pads is a typical aspect of the grooming process. As with all other grooming procedures, you will need to inspect the paw pads to ensure that the dog does not have any foot problems, growths, or injuries. Here are some common foot problems that may need to be attended to by a licensed veterinarian.

- If the dog is biting, licking, or gnawing at his paw pads, it's likely that he has allergies. A licensed veterinarian can assist the owner in determining what the dog may be allergic to. For instance, many dogs are allergic to certain ingredients in dog food; it is the third most common cause of allergies behind flea bite allergies and inhalant allergies.[†] Simply switching over to a dog food without the most common known ingredients that cause allergies (beef, dairy products, chicken, lamb, fish, chicken eggs, corn, wheat, and soy are the most common culprits, in order from the most common) will most often solve the problem. The owner should consult a veterinarian and/or canine nutritionist. The groomer can help by ensuring that the dog does not have any external parasites such as fleas as flea-bite allergies are the most common cause of canine allergies.

* Verplank, Melissa: *Notes from the Grooming Table*. White Dog Enterprises: MI. 2004.
[†] <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2&aid=143>

- Torn, shattered, or fractured nails can be caused by the dog catching his nail on the edge of something, such as the owner's living-room coffee table. If this happens, a veterinarian will need to remove the nail completely. If you notice that the dog has a frayed toe nail, you should alert the owner so she may consult her veterinarian. This occurrence is very painful for the dog.
- Tears in the paw pads are also awfully painful to a canine. Cuts are actually quite common as dogs are known to run uninhibited through rough terrain. If the cut is somewhat superficial, the groomer can help by washing the cut out with mild soap and water. Then, once the hair within the crevices of the paw pads is dry, the groomer should carefully clip the hair out of the pad, taking care not to clip over the cut. Next, a medicated ointment should be applied and the paw wrapped with gauze and vet wrap. The owner should be notified to remove the wrap when it begins to fray, re-medicate the cut, and re-wrap it so it can heal appropriately. Also, notify the owner to keep an eye on the bandages as many dogs will chew at and possibly succeed in removing them if they are not equipped with an Elizabethan collar. If the scratch is deep and bleeding, it may be washed out, medicated and wrapped, but a veterinarian should be consulted immediately. The groomer should not attempt to clip the hair out of the paw pads.
- Paw pads can often become dry and even cracked; this is due to the fact that dogs walk and run on a variety of rough surfaces. Paw pads in general should be tough as this assists the dog in protecting them from coarse terrain; however, overly dry and cracked pads should be attended to. There is a plethora of moisturizing products on the market, and it is a good idea for the groomer to have a paw-pad moisturizer in her toolbox. After bathing and clipping the hair from the paw pads, you should apply a generous amount of moisturizer (though always follow the manufacturer's instructions) and massage it into the pads. Inform the owner that her dog's paw pads are especially dry, and recommend a moisturizer to her so she may apply some at home.
- If foreign objects such as burrs, rocks, or mats are present in the hair that grows between the paw pads, they should be removed as debris in the interdigital area can cause the dog great discomfort. It is recommended that you use a comb to coax out the debris prior to clipping the hair out.
- Interdigital cysts can develop between the paw pads as well. They present as abnormal lumps or nodules somewhere on the pads. For instance, **cutaneous horns**, which are benign growths of hard tissue that look like small horns, commonly develop on a dog's paw pads. They are usually ½" to 2" hard, horn-like growths that must be surgically-removed by a

veterinarian.* If you notice any sort of growth or lump in the dog's paw pads, inform the owner immediately so she may take her dog to the veterinarian. Be very careful when clipping around the lump; avoid clipping over it as it may rupture.†

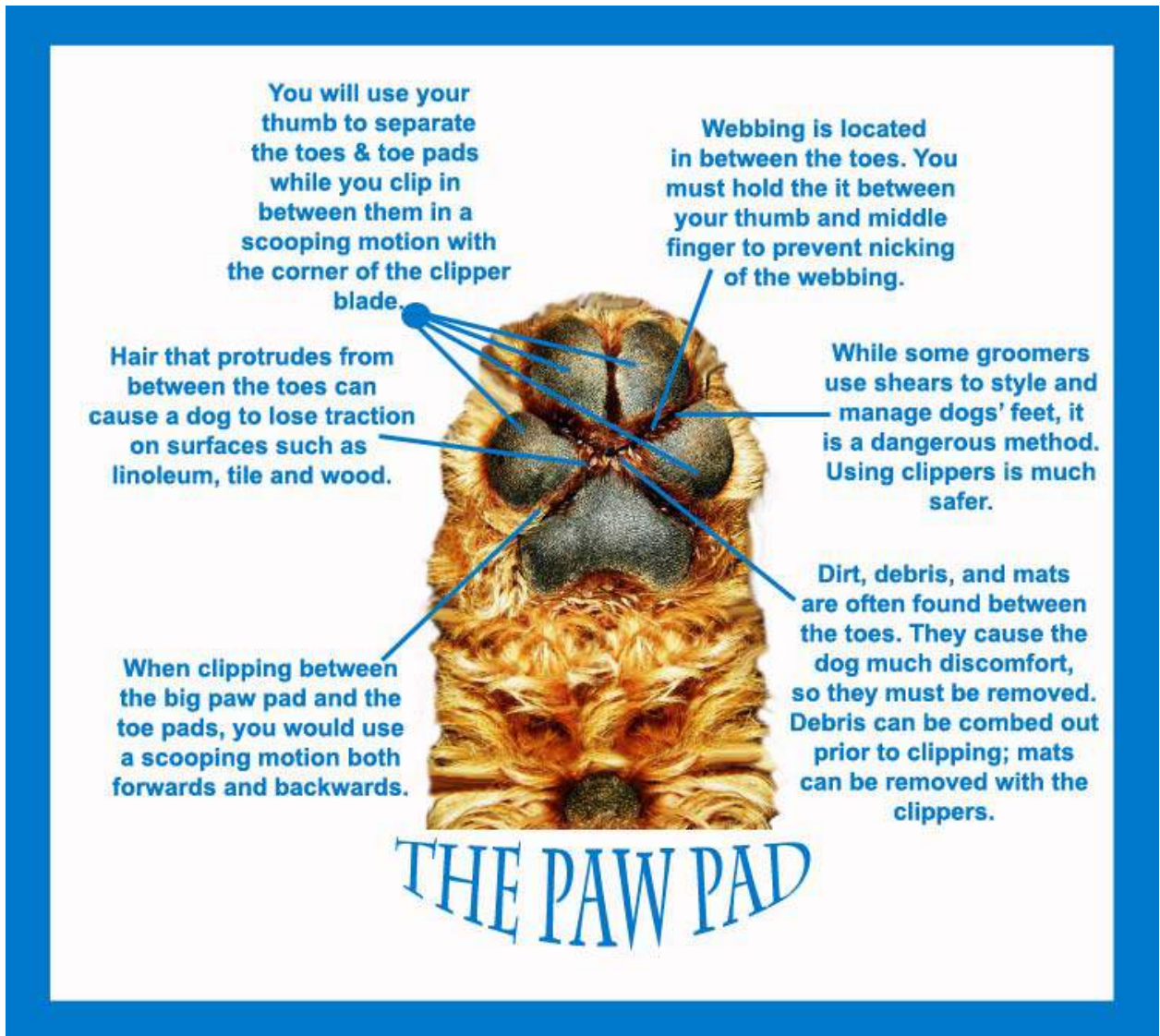
If the dog's paw pads are healthy and free of cuts or cysts, you may proceed to clipping the hair between the paw pads. Here, you will be instructed on how to do so safely and effectively.

First, you will need to collect the equipment that you will need to trim the dog's paw pads.

Tools for Trimming the Paw Pads

- ☑ Comb – a comb can be used to coax out any debris stuck in the hair between the paw pads to prevent bald spots on the foot. However, mats will be clipped out entirely, so a comb is not necessary for matting.
- ☑ Electric clippers – you will need your clippers for removal of the interdigital hair.
- ☑ Clipper blades – depending on your preferences and the length of the dog's coat, the clipper blade that you use can range from a #15 to a #40 blade. A #15 blade is customary, though a #10 blade should be used on dogs with sensitive skin.
- ☑ Thinning shears – while removal of the hair should be done with clippers and not shears for safety reasons, you may need thinning shears to balance out the length of the hair around the foot so that it does not look choppy or uneven.
- ☑ Shears – some groomers prefer to use shears to evenly cut this hair out. However, if the dog flails, injury can result. Clippers are far safer for this procedure.
- ☑ Styptic powder – if you accidentally nick the webbing between the dog's toes, styptic powder or ointment can be used to stop the bleeding.

* <http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=2+1593&aid=424>
† www.scamperingpaws.com/health/dogfootproblems.shtml



In order to create a natural-looking foot and to remove the bulk of the interdigital hair, follow these instructions:

- Have the dog standing on your grooming table with a grooming loop secured around his neck. You may also want to have a hip restraint device on him as most dogs will try to sit down during this procedure. This is because lifting up one of their feet may cause them to sway, which will coerce them to sit down to avoid falling. Sitting down while the clipper blade is between his paw pads can cause injury.
- Start with the dog's back foot; either side is acceptable. You can stand either to the side of the dog or behind him, whichever gives you a better perspective. It is a good idea to start with the back feet so that you can gauge the dog's reaction to the clipper blade being in his

interdigital area. A dog that flails can injure himself, which is why clippers are a better choice than shears. This procedure can tickle, which will cause the dog to tear his foot away from the groomer. Clippers may still nick the webbing of the foot, but cutting the dog is far less likely than when working with shears.

- Hold the dog's foot forward, towards his front end, and bend his ankle so that the paw pad is facing up, towards you. Only hold the foot high enough to reach it sufficiently; otherwise, the dog will be uncomfortable and will try to pull his foot away from you, making the process difficult for both of you. Also, lifting the foot up high will cause him to lose his balance, so keeping it closer to the table will maintain his stance. You will only need to lift the feet an inch or two above the tabletop in order to reach them. Finally, it is easier for a dog to reach around and bite you if you are holding his back paw up higher as your hands would be practically parallel with his head, so holding his foot lower will keep you safer.
- Depending on the groomer, the preference for holding the paw pad while clipping may be different. Here are two ways of holding the paws while trimming between and around the paw pads:
 - With your hand making a "C" shape, place your thumb under the large paw pad, perpendicular to the toes. Wrap your fingers around the top part of the dog's toes, also perpendicular to the pads. Your index finger will rest on the outer aspect of the toes and toenails while the rest of your fingers will wrap around the top of the paw. This grasp gives you a good amount of control over the foot and also gives you the option of using your fingers as support for clipping the excess coat from around the foot. Additionally, it decreases the risk of you accidentally clipping into the side coat of the foot, making an uneven-looking paw that does not blend with the rest of the dog's leg.* This grip is most appropriate for when you are trying to clip the hair that grows from in between the pads so that it is flush with the pads. If you are attempting to remove the hair from in between the pads, the hold described next may be more accommodating.

When clipping the interdigital hair from the back paw pads, you should bend the dog's paw toward his front end.



This will give you a good view of the paw pad while making the dog as comfortable as possible.

You may even choose to have the dog lie down as this will give you a similar perspective and is most comfortable for the dog.

* Verplank, Melissa: Notes from the Grooming Table. White Dog Enterprises: MI. 2004.

- Some groomers prefer to place their thumbs in between the paw pads with the rest of their fingers on the top or outer aspect of the paw, lightly pinching the webbing between their thumbs and fingers and gently spreading the toes apart. By softly gripping the webbing in between the dog's paw pads, you can reduce the risk of accidentally nicking the webbing with the clippers. It also helps you to spread the toes apart in order to get between them with the clippers. This grip is more appropriate when you are attempting to remove more of the hair from in between the pads. It is also a good safety measure for beginning groomers.



- If there is any dirt or debris stuck in the interdigital hair, use your comb to gently coax it out, taking care to not pull too hard on the hair. If you cannot easily get the matter out with a comb, you can simply clip it out. Do not attempt to de-mat the dog's toe hair; mats should be clipped out with your electric clippers. Remember that mat removal is far more humane than dematting.
- Place your #15 clipper blade (or your choice of blade depending on your preferences) on your clippers and turn them on. Make sure the blade is sharp and cool so that it does not yank the hair out or burn the dog's sensitive interdigital skin.
- If you are using the grip in which you gently pinch the webbing and spread the toes apart, you will be removing more hair from between the pads. If so, follow these directions:

- Using a scooping motion, situate the clipper blade in between the dog's big paw pad and his other toe pads and clip the hair out. You can scoop both from front to back (from the toes toward the big pad) and from back to front (from the big paw pad towards the toes). Once you have clipped the hair in one direction, turn the clippers around and clip in the other direction. Do so until all the hair is removed horizontally between the big and small paw pads.
- Next, you will remove the vertical hair growing between the dog's smaller toe pads. To do so, separate the paw pads and use just the inside corner of the clipper blade in a scooping motion to gently clip out all interdigital hair. Clip in between each toe in each direction until all of the hair is clipped down sufficiently.
- If you are simply cupping the foot and not spreading the toes apart with your fingers, you will be removing slightly less hair than with the aforementioned method. If using this technique, follow these instructions:
 - With the clipper blade parallel to the foot pad, begin lightly clipping the hair that protrudes from between the toes. Clip from the toes towards the large paw pad, starting with the two middle toes. While barely touching the paw pads with the clipper blade, pass over the entire underside of the foot.
 - Next, make another pass over the foot, this time starting at one of the outside toes.
 - Make yet another pass over the foot pad with the clipper, this time starting from the other outer toe pad.
 - Finally, clip lightly along the horizontal line between the large paw pad and the toe pads. To do so, use your cupped hand to spread the foot pads apart gently. Starting on either side of the foot pad, scoop twice in the crevice between the large and small pads. Repeat on the other side of the large pad.*
- When moving on to the front feet, you can pick the foot up and bend the leg at the ankle so that the paw pad is facing up, giving you a clear view of the paw pad.
- Remember to be careful to not nick the webbing that connects the toes; if you do, you can stop the bleeding and control the pain using styptic powder.



* Verplank, Melissa: Notes from the Grooming Table. White Dog Enterprises: MI. 2004.

 **Special Note** 

You can also clip the dog's hind paws with him lying down as this may prevent him from wobbling and/or struggling with you while you are clipping. Holding the paw up can put him off-balance, causing him to fiddle around to achieve footing. It also gives you a good view of the paw pads.

Once you have finished clipping between the paw pads, you can move on to the top side of the foot. Hold the dog's foot up off the table by only a couple of inches; you should be looking at the top aspect of the foot. First, use a comb to back-brush the hair on the top side of the foot so that you can see which strands are especially long and uneven. Then, using your thinning shears, trim the hair that grows along the outer ridge of the foot, such as between the toe nails and along the outside of the toes. Make sure that the hair is even on all sides, and be careful not to leave any bald spots on the foot as this will make the dog's legs look awkward.

Creating a natural-looking foot is an essential aspect of the grooming process that completes the dog's look nicely. You will learn more about trimming the outer aspect of a dog's feet later on when studying breed-specific styles as there are standards for the trimming of each breed's feet.