



# Scratch Board Training: A Nicer Nail Trim!

A scratch board is a great (and easy!) alternative to nail trimming for dogs who are fearful or aggressive for nail trims! Ready to get started and teach YOUR dog this valuable skill? Let's go!

## You Will Need:

- A scratch board
- Small, tasty treats
- A clicker
- A comfortable, quiet place to train

## What is the clicker for? Do I HAVE to use it?

A "clicker" is a training tool known as a "marker". The click "marks" the precise behavior that is being rewarded, and the click is ALWAYS followed by a treat. The dog learns that the click predicts food and to pay attention to what behaviors earn a click. As your dog starts working, whenever he hears the click he knows he just did the right behavior and will start do it more to earn more food. It is especially helpful for marking QUICK behaviors (such as paw movement!) Even if your dog has never used a clicker before

there is no additional training involved, all it takes is a few clicks paired with treats before your dog gets it! The word "yes!" (said quickly) can be used instead, but the training will be slower. With a clicker there is no confusion for your dog as to what behavior you want, which prevents frustration and speeds up learning!

*A verbal marker using the word "yes!" can be used instead of a clicker, although the progress will be slower.*

## Teaching Your Dog

To teach the dog to use a scratch board we first must find a way to get the dog to put his paw on the scratching surface so we can click/treat. The dog will figure out that he is being rewarded for placing his paw on the board and will begin to offer it on his own. There are lots of ways to do this, all are great options so choose what works best for your dog.

**Shake/Give Paw:** If your dog already knows a cue for "paw" or "shake" it can be used as a prompt.

- With your dog in front of you (facing you) sit on a chair or on the floor and position the scratch board between/on your legs at a slight angle, as shown in the photo.
- Cue your dog to "shake" or give "paw" OVER the scratch board, reward and repeat.
- Next, cue your dog to shake but as he does, move your hand out of the way so his paw falls



*Position your scratch board at an angle*

and lands on the scratch board. Click (or say, yes!) and reward excitedly with a treat. Repeat a few times with both paws.

- Now, remove your hand entirely, point to the board and cue your dog to “shake”, he has been rewarded several times for “kicking” the board and will quickly put his paw on! Click (or say, yes!) and feed several small treats in a row excitedly! Repeat with both paws.

**Hidden Treasure:** If your dog is still reluctant to paw the board a hidden treasure game can be used as another form of prompting!

- Take several yummy, stinky treats your dog will love. Show him a treat and let him sniff it.
- With your dog watching, take the treat, place it on the floor and gently cover the treat with your scratch board (you can hold the board up a little to prevent smushing the treat but not high enough that he could get to the treat).
- Now your dog will try to get the treat, most dogs will try to paw or scratch at the board to move it out of the way. When this happens, click and treat and lots of praise!
- Repeat a few times until your dog is comfortable pawing at the board.

**Shaping/Luring:** Dogs are naturally curious and many of them are eager to check out a new object in the environment. With shaping you present the dog with an object and reward the dog for interacting with it in any way, then gradually reward for only certain types of interactions.

- Call your dog over, put the scratch board on the floor and if your dog shows any interest such as sniffing it, standing on it or even looking at it, click and toss a treat. Pick up and put down the board a few times, continuing to click and treat for interest.
- Once your dog is eagerly interacting with the board, stop rewarding for anything other than a paw or paws on the board, ignoring sniffing, looking etc. The behaviors that are not generating a reward will be faded out, until he is consistently offering to paw the board.
- If your pup doesn't automatically investigate the board take a treat and lure him forward until one or more of his paws are on the board, then click and treat! Repeat! Continue until your dog is readily placing his paw(s) on the board. Finally, switch to placing the board at an angle (as shown above) and click and treat for paw placement on the angled board.

### He STILL isn't getting it!

*If your dog is stumped, play “hidden treasure”, but use a towel the dog can move with his paw. Let him practice pawing at the towel and finding the treat while you encourage him to “Dig! Dig!” a few times then try with the board again.*

### *Shaping is a great option for dogs who:*

- ❖ Do not already have a shake/paw cue.
- ❖ Are fearful/timid of new objects in the environment.
- ❖ Become easily stressed or frustrated when trying to learn something new.
- ❖ Are already clicker trained or have done shaping exercises in the past.

## Scratch Training

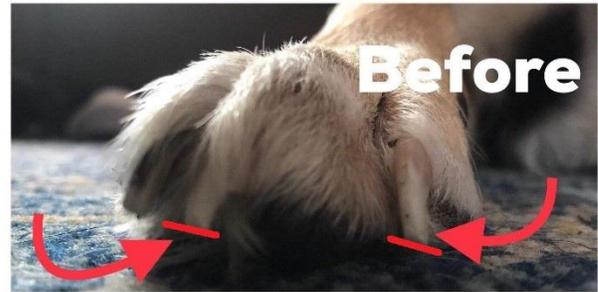
Continue to click/treat for placing paw(s) on the board until the response becomes automatic. When your dog immediately places his paw on the board when it is offered, it is time to shape the scratching!

Have you ever had a vending machine that won't drop your chips? You were expecting the money going into the machine to result in a tasty snack! Immediately, you try harder to get the snack – you push the button harder, tap the glass, shake or kick the machine trying to get it to work. This is how you will teach your dog!

Offer the board to your dog but DON'T click and treat when he puts his paw on it. When the reward he is expecting does not appear he will be confused and try to make the board "work". Watch for any paw movement on the board – he may pick his paw up and put it back down again more forcefully, he may

move his foot around or he may even go right to scratching at the board in frustration. Click and treat for any increased

movement on the board. Keep practicing, delivering your clicks and treats for the hardest kicks and scratches. The final goal is to create a "digging" motion, so keep clicking and treating for anything that heads in that direction! Very quickly your dog will figure it out and begin to scratch deeply, having a great time while filing his nails as well!



*A few minutes with a scratch board shortened these nails substantially!*

### *What about the back feet?*

If needed, back nails can be done by training your dog to back up onto the board with his back feet and scratch backwards.

Focus on the front feet first, getting your dog comfortable with the process, before training the back feet.

### Other Tips:

- ❖ Keep training sessions short and fun! You might be surprised at how quick your dog catches on, but don't try to rush it and get the behavior done in one session. Practice for a few minutes at a time and always stop before your dog loses interest.
- ❖ Not a chow hound? For dogs who prefer toys to food, use tug or fetch as a reward when training this behavior.
- ❖ Each dog will have a different level of enthusiasm on the scratch board. An enthusiastic dog may require a finer grit to prevent getting too close to the quick and hurting themselves, whereas a dog who is not enthusiastic may require coarser paper in order to make progress. Most dogs are comfortable with a 30-80grit sanding surfaces.
- ❖ Keep a close eye on your dog's nails to make sure too much nail isn't being removed. Stop and checking the nails every few scratches to see how much nail has been worn down.
- ❖ **For more information and tons of expert support, check out the Facebook group "Nail Maintenance for Dogs"**