Trimming My Cat’s Nails

Trimming your cat’s nails on a regular basis reduces damage from scratching, both to you and your family and to your furniture! Their nails grow quickly so plan on giving pedicures every couple of weeks or so. I always found cats much more cooperative for nail trims than dogs. You should be able to do your kitty at home!

Meet the paw

Most cats need to get used to having their paws handled and their claws extended. This doesn’t hurt at all. Their trepidation is due to being at a disadvantage if someone else has their paw. Treats usually work very well to overcome this concern! Start when your kitty is relaxed. It’s not going to work if he would much rather run around the house, watch the birds outside, or play with toys.

Either put the cat on your lap or have him rest on the top of something. Since my cats have the run of my house, I have them sit on the top of a sofa! This allows me to work with them without bending over much. Pick a spot where you are both comfortable.

Start by massaging and gently tugging on your cat’s paws. Spread the toes slightly and get your cat used to you moving them. Have treats handy to give while your cat is calmly accepting the paw work. If your cat objects, let the paw go and try again later with slower movements.

Next, work on extending the claw. Put your thumb on top of the toe and a finger under the pad of the nail. When you apply slight pressure, the nail should stick out. You need to do this to be able to see the claw in order to cut it. Again, none of this should hurt and treats go a long way for most cats!

Nail trimmers

Once your cat is used to the whole paw thing, start clipping nails. First, though, you have to decide what you are going to use. There are different types of nail clippers. One is a guillotine type. When using this type, have the screws on it facing your cat’s paw. This allows a tiny bit more space between the nail and the cutting edge so you are less likely to cut too much off.

This may look like I’m squishing the toes but Clipper is holding perfectly still. You don’t need a lot of pressure to extend the nails.
Another type works like scissors. I’m sure you can figure these out!

You can also use human nail clippers for most cats unless their nails are tough. These clippers should be perpendicular to the nail. Otherwise, the nail is more likely to be crushed instead of cut and that makes it more prone to splintering.

Some people use a Dremel®-type tool which grinds down the nail. Pick whichever type is most comfortable for you. I use the scissors type but have used all of the options, except a Dremel®, and they all work.

Start cutting

Now that you’ve decided on the implement to use, you have to decide where to make the cut. Cats’ nails are usually clear so it is easy to see where the “quick” is. This appears as a pink area near the base of the nail and has the blood vessels and nerves. If you cut into this area, it will bleed and hurt! Make your cut away from this area.

You want to get the “hook” off to reduce the sharpness of the nail. When in doubt, trim less rather than “a little extra.” The good news is you can usually see cats’ nails well enough to avoid cutting them too short.

Most cats have five toes on the front paws and four on the back. Don’t forget the dewclaw that is further up on the inside of the front leg. Some cats have extra toes. These often need to be trimmed more often so the claw doesn’t grow into the skin. This can happen with other claws occasionally as well.
Other considerations

If you accidentally cut too much and your kitty starts bleeding, use a styptic pencil or powder to stop it. If you just put pressure on it, that will usually work too. It should stop within 5 minutes.

If you are very hesitant and unsure of yourself, ask your veterinarian or a groomer to show you how to do it. She can show you on a few toes and you can do the other toes while she watches you. You’ll feel like a pro in no time!

The most important thing to remember with cats is they do not like restraint. I can trim the nails on all three of my cats by myself without any restraint. You can do this too. It really isn’t that hard! Get them used to the process and take it slow in the beginning with lots of treats. If you grab her, wrap her in a towel, and have someone hold her down, I can guarantee Kitty will struggle. If you need to, have another person distract her with treats while you trim the nails.

Nail trimming should always be done when your cat is relaxed. A good time is often after a meal. At the beginning if she will only sit still for a couple nails, stop and finish later. Take your time and keep rewarding her for being calm.

Thanks Clipper for demonstrating nail trimming! Clipper does his yoga pose, “Meatloaf”, afterward, carefully tucking that pedicure underneath him!

Thanks for Caring

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