



Cat Claw Clipping

Like our fingernails, cats' claws grow continuously. Some cats may only need clipping every few months. Others may need it every few weeks. It is important to check your cat's toenails at least once a month. It is easier to clip often, taking less of the claw than to wait too long and have to deal with little daggers. For us to trim our own nails regularly is usually a fairly simple, stress-free procedure. Doing the same for our cats can be more difficult. This article will discuss some ways to make the whole process a little easier.

Cats mark territory by sharpening their claws on a surface. This leaves both a visual marker and a scent marker from the scent glands on their feet. Scratching is an important natural part of a cat's behavior; it feels good and helps relieve stress. By trimming the nails you can reduce the amount of damage the claws do, while allowing the cat to continue following his natural instincts. You may not currently care whether the cat uses your furniture or carpet as a scratching post, but you might care someday when the cat can't tell the difference between that old sofa and the brand new one. So, now is a good time to start learning how to cut those claws.

Cats who stay indoors may need their nails trimmed more regularly than cats who go outside—even if they use their scratching posts often. Scratching on a post helps to remove the “dead” parts of the nail, thus making the nail thinner and sharper. Nails that have not been trimmed for a long time may grow in a circular shape causing the tips to grow into the cat's paw pad, or they may become too thick which sometimes happens with older or less active cats. In this case the sheath doesn't get removed so the claw becomes too wide and starts growing into the cat's pad. This can be extremely painful and may require medical treatment and minor surgery. It can also lead to infection. This is why providing a good scratching post and regular trimming are essential to meeting the basic health and behavioral needs of your cat.

Some important tips:

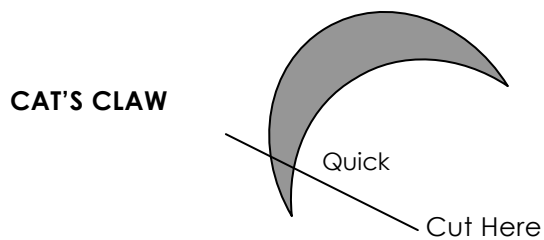
- ❖ Handling your cat's paws regularly, when he's relaxed will allow him to become used to the feeling of having his paws touched. He may then be less upset at claw clipping time.
- ❖ Ask someone to help you; it is much easier than trying to hold a struggling cat and wield clippers simultaneously. A “scruff-hold” can be used to restrain the cat. This involves firmly, yet gently restraining the cat by holding his or her scruff and supporting the rest of the cat's body. While one person holds, the helper can do the actual clipping. Before you attempt it on your own, have your veterinarian demonstrate this technique for you.
- ❖ Choose a time when your cat is calm—naptime may be the best. It is possible that you may only be able to do one toe at a time, especially at first.

How to do it:

- ❖ Check the cat's paws for dirt; although they usually keep their own feet clean, you will want to be able to see the claw clearly. You can extend the cat's nail by picking up the cat's foot and gently applying a little pressure on the top and bottom of the toe just behind the nail.
- ❖ Make sure there is enough light. Having the cat's paw between the source of light and yourself makes it much easier to see where you need to cut.



- ❖ Keep the clippers perpendicular to the nail. Look for the “quick” in the cat's nail. Notice how far into the nail the quick extends. (The quick is a vein. You can see it as the pinkish area inside the nail.) The clipper is best placed about 1/8 inch forward of the quick. If your cat will sit still long enough, you may want to gently file the tips after clipping.



If you trim the nail too close:

Your cat may give a cry and try to pull away from you. You may observe a small bit of blood on the end of the nail. Wipe the blood away with a tissue or paper towel. Dab some super glue or styptic powder on the tip to stop the bleeding. You can find these products at the drug store or at a pet shop. In the future, you will want to cut the nails a little further away from the quick.

We hope this handout will help you should you want to clip your cat's claws in the future. If you have any further questions, you can contact the Cat Behavior Program at the San Francisco SPCA at 415-554-3075.