

Feline Manicure: Trimming Your Cat's Claws

If you've got a cat that just has to scratch, but you also have furniture that you'd rather keep intact, a regular claw-trimming routine may be the solution you've been hoping for! Trimming a cat's claws allows him to keep on with his natural, healthy behavior, including scratching, without doing any damage to your furniture (or skin).

Choosing a tool

There are plenty of options to choose from when you're looking for the perfect claw-trimming tool, and like most things involved in caring for a cat, it may take a little experience to figure out what type will work best for you. Some people find it easier to use special scissors, some prefer trimmers especially for cats, and some just use plain old nail clippers. Whatever you choose, the important thing is to make sure you're using a sharp blade; a dull blade causes extra pressure, and can make the nail split or bleed. And if the experience is that unpleasant for your cat, she's unlikely to let you keep doing it!

Prep work

The biggest trick to trimming a cat's claws is getting the feline in question used to having her paws handled. Whether you've adopted a kitten or an adult cat, start working on it right away; spend time every day holding her, handling her paws, and applying gentle pressure to extend her claws. Kittens are likely to become accustomed to this more quickly than adults, so be patient. You don't want to rush your cat, because if she is uncomfortable having her paws handled in general, the addition of you coming at them with a sharp object is not going to make matters easier. The good news is that you only need to worry about the front paws when it's time for a trim: cats never scratch with their hind claws, and will maintain them on their own, so it's just easier for everybody to leave the hind paws alone!

Take a little off the top

First of all, even if your cat is accustomed to having her paws handled, it helps to have two people assist in the trim: one to hold the cat and keep her comfortable, and one to actually trim the claws.

Don't let this discourage you if you find yourself in a one-person home – it's perfectly possible to trim a cat's claws on your own – but it'll make life a little easier if you're not trying to both juggle a cat and trim each claw.

To extend a cat's claws so that you can trim them, hold the cat's paw in your hand and press down gently on the top of the last joint of the toe with your thumb. Remember that each of a cat's claws has a quick, just like the pink part of a person's fingernails, and just like your fingernails, a trim only hurts if you cut too far down and hit the pink. You should be able to see where the quick ends on most cats' claws, but if you can't, play it safe and only take off the sharp tip of the claw to avoid unnecessary pain. Be sure to keep the trimmers angled vertically, rather than with the curve of the claw – trimming with the curve of the claw is more likely to cause splitting and result in a ragged edge. If you do nick the quick of the claw, a little bleeding may occur; try to apply pressure to the very tip of the claw, or dip the claw in styptic powder, and bleeding should stop quickly. It's best to leave the cat alone for a while after such an experience, rather than attempt to continue trimming her nails right away...she probably won't be in a very forgiving mood for at least a few hours afterwards.

Don't worry if you can't get all of your cat's claws trimmed in one sitting – just take it one at a time. Cats aren't always as patient as we would like, and your new friend may not want to sit still long enough for you to get all ten of her front toes manicured. When she gets squirmy, just let her take a break; there's always another opportunity to finish up the job.