

TRIMMING YOUR CAT'S CLAWS

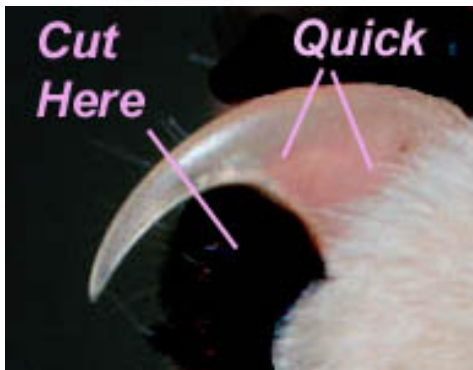
If possible start training your cat to have her claws trimmed as a kitten. Gently stroke your cat's paws often, getting her used to having her paws held before you attempt trimming. Be sure to reward your cat with a special food treat—one that she receives only during claw trimming or some other grooming procedure—during or immediately after trimming. The best time to trim your cat's claws is when she is relaxed or sleepy. **Never try to give a pedicure right after a stressful experience or an energetic round of play.**

Your cat should be resting comfortably on your lap, the floor, or a table. Hold a paw in one hand and press a toe pad gently to extend the claw.

The “quick” is the pink tissue on the inside of the claw. Avoid the quick when you trim the claw; cutting into it will cause pain and bleeding. You want to remove the sharp tip below the quick & away from the toe.

If your cat becomes impatient, take a break and try again later. Even if you can clip only a claw or two a day, eventually you'll complete the task.

Because cats do little damage with their rear claws and do a good job of keeping them trim themselves—by chewing them—many cat owners never clip the rear claws. Others trim their cats' rear claws three or four times a year or have them done by their veterinarian or a professional groomer.



Gently press the cat's toe pads to reveal sharp claws in need of a trim.

Notice the pink tissue (the quick) on the inside of the claw. Avoid the quick when you trim the claw; cutting into it will cause pain and bleeding. Remove the sharp tip below the quick (away from the toe), clipping about halfway between the end of the quick and the tip of claw. In the beginning clip just the very tip until you are more comfortable cutting a little more.

If you accidentally clip into the quick, don't panic. The claw may bleed for a moment, but it will usually stop very quickly. Soothe your cat by speaking softly to her and stroking her head. If the bleeding hasn't stopped after a minute or so, touch a styptic pencil to the claw end or pat on styptic powder or corn starch to help staunch the bleeding.

How often you need to clip your cat's claws depends somewhat on how much of the tip you remove, but usually a clipping every two weeks or even once a month will suffice. If your cat absolutely refuses to allow you to clip its claws, get help from your veterinarian or a professional groomer.

Special claw trimmers (two types are shown) are available from veterinarians or pet supply stores, but sharp nail clippers for humans also work. Keep a styptic (astringent) pencil or powder on hand in case you accidentally clip into the quick and bleeding hasn't stopped within a couple of minutes.



How to Manage Your Cat and its Claws

Your cat will be much happier with its claws, and will want to use them. Fortunately, there are some simple steps in claw management that you can take to ensure that you and your cat remain happy.

Effective claw management involves three basic principles:

1. Give your cat something good to scratch.

Scratching posts are the foundation of a good claw management strategy. Every house should have at least one vertical scratching post, and the more the merrier. The post should be at least 28 inches tall in order for your cat to do a full stretch. It should have a large base so it doesn't tip over easily. The surface should provide resistance to claws being pulled through - the most common surfaces are sisal rope, tight-weave carpet or bear wood. A mixture of textures is best.

From the cat's perspective, there's nothing quite like a floor-to-ceiling, multi-tiered cat tree, as it serves as a scratching post, playground and bed. They are expensive, but they last a lot longer than smaller posts and will make both your cat and you much more happy. On the other end of the economical spectrum, horizontal cardboard scratch boxes are excellent scratching toys as well. Your best bet is a combination of all of the above. Try using catnip to mark acceptable scratching surfaces, or scratch it yourself to show how it's done.

Location is also important. Cats like to scratch when they make their grand entrance into a room, so it is a good idea to place scratching surfaces near doors. If your cat is ignoring a perfectly good scratching post, move it a couple of feet - this can make all the difference, for



reasons that are a complete mystery to anybody who doesn't have the mind of a cat.

2. Teach your cat which surfaces are not acceptable to scratch

Cats can be fairly particular about what they scratch. If you train your cat early to use the appropriate surfaces and avoid the inappropriate ones (furniture, legs, etc.), they will learn and be much less inclined to stray from their good habits.

The best way to teach a cat not to scratch something is by using a combination of positive and negative reinforcement. Negative reinforcement can include a squirt with a spray bottle filled with water, saying "no!" in a loud, disapproving way, shaking a can filled with pebbles or pennies, and even temporarily isolating the cat in a bathroom or other such space if it misbehaves. Positive reinforcement includes stroking, talking in a calm, approving voice, giving treats and otherwise showering the cat with positive attention. Be consistent with your reinforcement - you won't teach your cat anything by sending mixed messages.

You can also protect furniture by making it unappealing as a scratching surface - by temporarily cover the furniture with a sheet, slipcover or double-sticky tape.

3. Keep your cat's nails trimmed or capped

Regularly clipping your cat's nails will greatly reduce its ability to cause damage with its claws, and if done properly will not hurt the cat. It is best to use a trimmer designed for cat's claws rather than a scissors or human nail clipper.

If none of these are effective, you can always put SoftPaws on your cat's front nails. SoftPaws are small vinyl caps that are glued onto a cat's claws and serve as dull sheaths. They last for four-six weeks, are easy to use and replace and don't hurt the cat. They also come in different colors. SoftPaws are sold at veterinarians' and also over-the-counter at many pet stores. If you buy them at your vet, bring your cat and have them put on so you can see how it is done.

Adapted from Gary Loewenthal, "Why Cats Need Claws," THE WHOLE CAT JOURNAL, September 2002.