

Paul's Pet Page



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We always have a regular stream of people bringing their pets in for nail clipping. Sometimes the owner has tried to do this at home and it has gone wrong – too much of the nail has been clipped back and there is bleeding – so the owner then hurries to the practice justifiably worried and full of remorse. I hope to explain below how to do it properly to try to avoid any problems. If you are in the slightest bit worried about doing it or not sure if nails need clipping go to your vets and ask to see a nurse, as they will happily let you know if they need clipping and show you how to do it. If the nurse clips them for you it will cost about £5.00.

I am using photographs of both cats and dogs as the principle is broadly the same, so don't worry if the animal in the photos changes species halfway through!

Most cats and dogs do not like having their claws trimmed. Start trimming claws in young animals so that they get used to the process. Some cats and dogs will happily sit in your lap or on a table while you trim their claws, but others may be less happy about things and need some form of restraint. If your pet is one of those who has his / her own views about whether or not their nails are going to be trimmed, you are probably better off going to see your veterinary nurse – but please tell them that 'attitude' might be a problem, as they will not thank you if they end up being bitten or seriously scratched....

One method to restrain the pet is to place her/him on a table. Stand on the side of the table opposite to the claws you are trimming. Drape your arms and upper body over the dog. When trimming the front claws, keep your left forearm over the neck to keep the dog from

lifting its head. Hold the paw in your left hand and hold the trimmer in your right hand. If the dog tries to stand, lean your upper body over their shoulders to prevent them from rising. If your pet is too wriggly, try laying them on their side. Use your right arm and upper body to keep the dog on their side. Hold the trimmer in your right hand. Use your left arm to keep the head on the table and use the left hand to hold the paw. Like most things in life this is easier to do if you have a helper!



There are several styles of nail trimmers, including a guillotine type, a standard human fingernail clipper or scissors type.

The guillotine type is the easiest to use in dogs, though either the guillotine type or a human fingernail clipper are easiest to use in cats. The scissors-type is used if a nail has grown so long that it's sticking into the toe-pad. This most often happens to dew claws, which are the claws on the inner side of the paw. Dew claws do not touch the ground so they are not worn down as the dog walks. Cats have a dew claw on the inner side of each foot too, so you may need to trim these as they are not worn down when the cat scratches, and they also can grow in a circle, growing into the pad and causing problems.



Although the dew claw seems to be flat to the side of the paw, it can usually be bent away from the leg so that you can fit a guillotine type trimmer over the tip of the nail.

The guillotine type trimmers have stationary ring through which the nail is placed, and a cutting blade that moves up to slice off the nail when the handles of the trimmer are squeezed.

this side will face you as you trim nails



this side will face the pet as you trim nails



As the handles are squeezed, the cutting blade slides across the stationary ring.

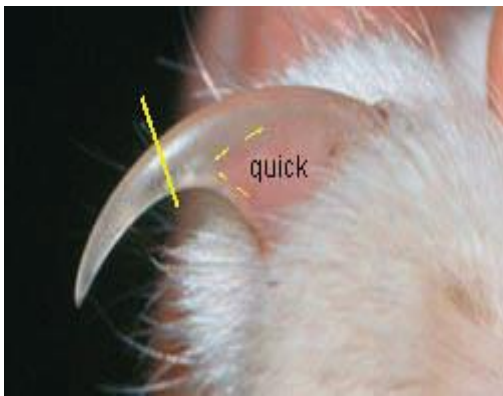
Unlike cats, dogs do not have retractile claws. The colour of the nail is determined by the colour of the surrounding skin and hair. As you can see from the photo below, this dog has black claws on the brown paw and a mixture of white and black claws on the white paw.



Cats have retractile claws so you need to gently squeeze the toe between thumb and forefinger to expose the claw.



Light coloured claws are easier to cut than dark claws as the blood vessels and nerves that supply the toenail, called the quick, is easier to see. Most cats have light coloured claws. You want to cut the claw to within approximately 2 mm of the quick, if you cut the quick your pet will bleed and feel pain – and may in turn make sure that you bleed and feel pain too!



The tip of the nail is placed in the stationary ring in the trimmer with the clipper perpendicular to the nail (cutting top to bottom). If the trimmer is placed parallel to the nail (cutting from side to side), the nail is crushed and may splinter. This same principle applies if you are using human style nail clippers on your cat

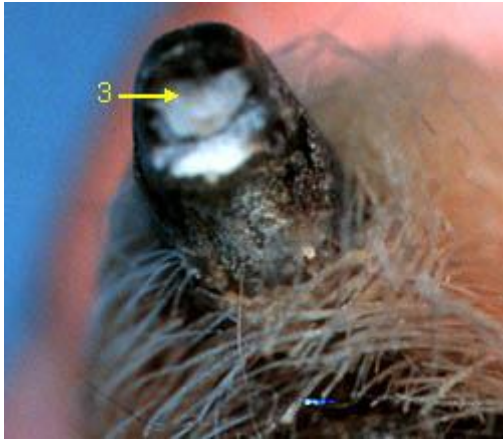
The cutting blade should be facing you, **NOT** your pet. The screws on the handle of the trimmer should be facing your pet. If you turn the trimmer around with the screws toward you, the cutting blade is cutting closer to the quick than if the trimmer is held with the cutting blade toward you. You are less likely to cut into the quick if the cutting blade faces you.



You cannot see the quick on dark coloured claws, making them more difficult to trim without cutting into the quick. Therefore it pays to trim dark coloured claws with several shallow cuts to reduce the chance of cutting into the quick. As you cut off small pieces of the nail, look at the cut edge of the nail. The light tissue (1) is the curved bottom part of the nail. The mottled light and dark tissue (2) is the top part of the nail.



As you cut the nail deeper, you will see a homogeneous gray to pink oval (3) starting to appear at the top of the cut surface of the nail. Stop cutting the nail at this point as additional cutting will cut into the quick. The sharper the trimmer, the cleaner the cut. You can file the end of the nail to smooth the cut surface, but in most cases it's wiser to quit while you're ahead!



If the claw is cut too short, you can use a styptic pencil containing silver nitrate to stop blood flow, although many animals object to this just as much, or more, than claw cutting, because it stings slightly. Even without any treatment the nail should stop bleeding in about 5 minutes or less; if it goes on longer than this then go to your vet straight away.

Best of luck, but remember if you are at all unsure, do go and see your veterinary nurse.

[Many thanks to Washington State University for the use of the photographs]