

JIM'S PET PAGE



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Has over 20 years experience in both small animal and large animal veterinary practice and is a director of Blake Veterinary Group Ltd

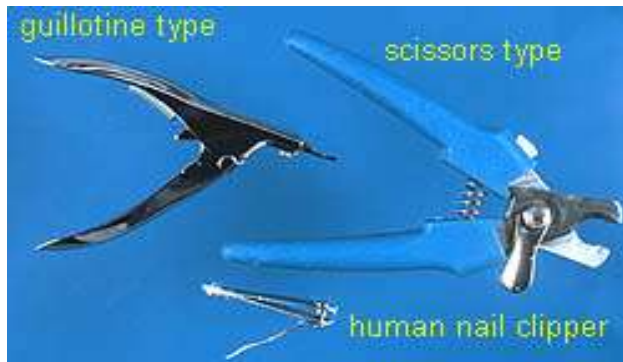
We always have a regular stream of people bringing their pets in for nail clipping , some of the animals have been clipped at home and it has gone wrong – too much of the nail has been clipped back and there is bleeding, the owner then comes to the practice justifiably worried and full of remorse. I hope to explain below how to do it properly to try to avoid this. If you are in the slightest bit worried about doing it or not sure if they need clipping go to your vets and ask to see a nurse, 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 less than £7.00.

I am going to use 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 half way 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 many require some form of restraint. If your pet is one of these you are probably better off going to see your veterinary nurse – but please tell them that restraint may be needed 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 his/her shoulders to prevent him/her from rising. If your pet is too wiggly, try laying him/her on his/her side. Use your right arm and upper body to keep the dog laying on his/her 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. 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, either the guillotine type or a human fingernail clipper are easiest to use in cats. The scissors-type is used if a toe nail is so long that it is curling in a circle. Long claws can grow into the toe-pad. This most often happens to dew claws, on dogs this is the claw 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 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 foot



The dew claw is attached to the leg by loose skin. The dew claw can usually be bent away from the leg so that you can fit a guillotine type trimmer over the tip of the dew claw.

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.

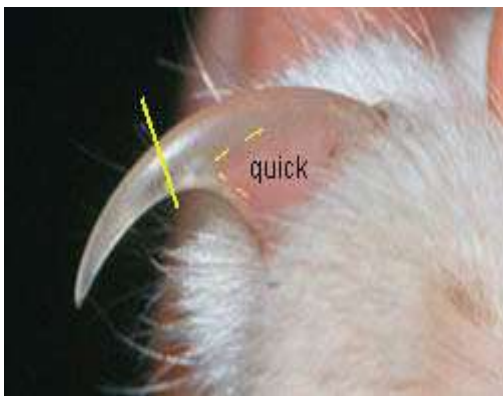
Unlike cats, dogs do not have retractile claws. The colour of the nail is determined by the colour of the surrounding skin and hair. As you can see from the photo below, this dog has black claws on the brown paw and a mixture of white and black claws on the white paw.



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.



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

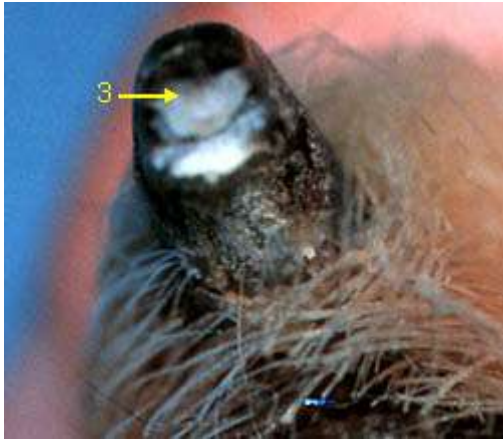
The cutting blade should be facing you, **NOT** your pet. The screws on the handle of the trimmer should be facing your pet. If you turn the trimmer around with the screws toward you, the cutting blade is cutting closer to the quick than if the trimmer is held with the cutting blade toward you. You are 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 cut dark coloured claws in several small 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.



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 the styptic pencil as much, or more, than claw cutting. Even without any treatment the nail should stop bleeding in about 5 minutes or less, if it persists 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]