

Easy as 1-2-3

Learn how to clip a cat's nails in three simple steps.

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Cats scratch. Whether it's a mountain lion, a bobcat or a domesticated tabby, cats scratch as part of their natural behavior. As described in "Solutions for a Scratch-Happy Cat," published in the December 2006 issue of CAT FANCY magazine, cats scratch to leave visual and olfactory marks, to stretch their muscles and tendons, and to shed the outer sheaths of their claws.

How can cat owners allow their pets to engage in this natural activity and still keep their furniture intact? They can do so by providing appropriate scratching surfaces, such as vertical and horizontal scratching posts, redirecting inappropriate behavior and keeping their nails trimmed.

"Keeping the cat's nails trimmed is something that owners need to teach their kittens very early," says Terry Marie Curtis, DVM, a clinical behaviorist at the department of small animal clinical sciences at the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine in Gainesville. "It is important that you make the nail-trimming process positive, so providing the kitten or cat with treats during the pedicure may help."

Clip it Good

Shayna Moore and Noelani Delacruz, veterinary assistants at Paradise Animal Clinic in Kalaheo, Hawaii, said the tools you'll need to clip your cat's nails include a sturdy surface, a towel, a pair of guillotine- or scissor-style clippers and a container of styptic powder in case of accidents. Enlist the help of an assistant, too, to help hold your cat still.

After you gather your tools, follow these step-by-step guidelines for clipping cats' claws, Moore and Delacruz provided:

step 1.

Hold the cat securely on a steady surface. If someone is assisting you, she can hold the cat by its scruff or lay it on its side. If you are doing it by yourself, steady the cat under your arm.

step 2.

Grab your clippers with your dominant hand and the cat's paw with the other hand. Using your thumb and index finger, gently press the cat's toe to extend its nail.

step 3.

Snip off just the top curve of the nail, being careful not to cut the quick, the pink part inside the nail that will bleed if nicked. Do the same with the other toes.

Clipping can be done monthly or as needed to keep the nails trimmed and dulled. Not only will your furniture be salvaged, but you will protect your cat from snagging its claws and protect yourself from accidental scratches as well.

Wendy Bedwell-Wilson is a freelance writer in Hawaii. Her cats Star and Benny prefer to scratch corrugated cardboard with a sprinkling of quality catnip.