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How to Trim a Cat's Claws

Trimming a cat's claws every few weeks is a vital part of maintaining the animal's hygiene. Regular trimming not only protects the health of a cat's caretakers, but also guarantees the well-being of their couches and armchairs. But if the idea of trimming a cat's claws has you biting your nails, know that all it takes is some patience and a bit of practice to sharpen your skills.

1: Stay On the Cutting Edge

There are plenty of tools available to trim a cat's claws; use whichever one works best for you and the animal. Some people prefer a special pair of scissors modified to hold a cat's claw in place, and others choose plier-like clippers or those with a sliding "guillotine" blade. Whatever your choice, be sure the blade remains sharp; the pressure from dull blades may hurt an animal and cause a nail to split or bleed.

2: Take Paws

If you approach a cat with a sharp object in one hand while trying to grab a paw with the other, odds are you'll come up empty-handed. Because cat's temperaments and dispositions vary greatly, there is not "perfect" way to handle a cat while trimming his claws. Some cats do well with no restraint at all, but most cats need to be held firmly but gently to make sure that no one gets hurt. Try resting the cat in the crook of one arm while holding one paw with the other hand. Or, place the animal on a table and lift one paw at a time. You may even be able to convince a particularly sociable cat to lay back on your lap. If you've got a helper, ask him to hold the cat while you clip the nails, or just ask him to rub the cat's nose or offer up a special treat.

4: Take a Little Off the Top

Now that you and your cat are in position, take a paw in your hand, curl your fingers into a fist, and use your thumb to gently press down on the joint just above the claw. When the claw extends, quickly but carefully snip off the sharp tip and no more. Don't get too close to the pink part of the nail called "the quick," where blood vessels and nerve endings lie. Just like the pink part of a human fingernail, the quick is very sensitive; cutting into this area will likely hurt the animal and cause bleeding. If this happens, apply a little pressure to the very tip of the claw or dip the claw in a bit of styptic powder, then leave the cat alone, being sure to check on him occasionally.

Note: When working with a long-haired cat, be sure the fur is clear of the clippers or you may pull the animal's fur, hurting the cat and hurting your chances of ever trimming nails again.

5: Take it one at a Time

If you aren't able to trim all 20 nails at once, don't worry. Few cats remain patient for more than a few minutes, so take what you can get, praise the animal for cooperating, then be on the lookout for the next opportunity—maybe even a catnap—to cut things down to size.