



ALLEN COUNTY

SPCA

YOUR COMMUNITY. YOUR SHELTER. YOUR PETS.

SCRATCHING BEHAVIOR & TRIMMING YOUR CAT'S NAILS

Scratching is a natural behavior which allows cats to remove the dead outer layer of their claws, mark their territory, stretch their bodies, and to work off energy. Since this action is natural, you can't stop your cat from scratching. However, you can give them acceptable things like a scratch post to use as an outlet.

To train your cat to use acceptable scratching objects, make sure they are in a good location for your cat to see and reach them. Some cats have preferences on the type of material, shape, and height of the scratcher, too. If your cat is trying to scratch on inappropriate objects, place new acceptable objects close by. Once you know your cat's preferences, you can place things like rope, corrugated cardboard, a log, or a scratcher from the pet store. Make sure they can stay standing when your cat goes to use them.

You can also cover the inappropriate objects with things your cat won't like, such as double sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, or sheets of sandpaper. Once your cat consistently uses

the appropriate object, it can be moved, but the new location should have your cat's preferences in mind. Slowly move it over the course of several days/weeks. Also, don't remove the unappealing coverings from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate object in its permanent location for weeks or even a month. Then the coverings should also be removed gradually.



As a last resort, there are products that go over your cat's claws. They are plastic caps that go on the tips of the nails with non-toxic adhesive. The process can be tedious, though. The caps can pop off and they need to be reattached as the nails grow. Some cats also don't like them very much. These products are just a temporary fix because they don't change the cat's behavior.

Never punish your cat for scratching. It won't change the behavior. The cat will simply learn to scratch when you aren't around rather than learn where it is appropriate to scratch.

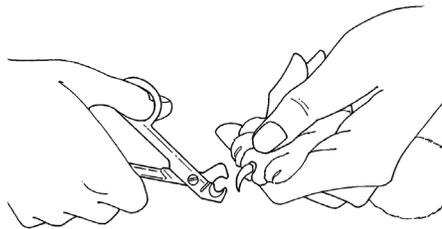
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To keep them sharp, cats keep their claws retracted except when they need them. When the nails become too long, they curve and can't be retracted completely. Long nails can also get snagged on your carpet and skin. The sharp tips of your cat's claws should be trimmed every week or so. When trimming, be sure to only cut the tip and not the pink part of their nail. If you cut too much, your cat will bleed and it will be painful for your pet. There are several types of claw trimmers that are designed for pets.

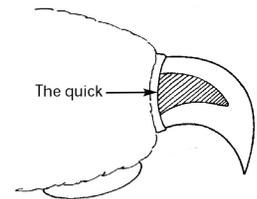
If your cat is sensitive to having their nails trimmed, try to make good associations to having their feet touched. Give your cat treats as you touch their legs and paws. Have your cat build up a tolerance to having their paws handled. From there you can start to trim the nails one at a time and giving treats to your pet. Start with one foot at a time until your cat is willing to let you do all four feet. Don't try to start with all four at once because both you and your cat will have negative memories of claw clippers. If your cat has issues with their nails being trimmed, you've gone too fast.

Having a second person to help you trim your cat's nails can be helpful, as well. One person can hold the cat and give them treats while the other carefully trims the nails.



Once you are in position to cut your cat's claws, take a paw in your hand, curl your fingers, and use your thumb to gently press down on the joint just above the nail. This will extend the claw out and you will quickly but carefully snip off the sharp tip. Don't cut too close to the pink part of the nail called "the quick," where the blood vessels and nerve endings are. Just like the pink part of a human fingernail, the quick is very sensitive and cutting into it will hurt and draw blood. If this happens, apply a little pressure to the very tip of the claw (not the entire paw, which will only increase the blood flow) or dip the claw in a bit of styptic powder, then leave the cat alone, checking on them occasionally.

Because cats' temperaments vary, there is no "perfect" way to handle a cat when trimming their nails. Some cats will do well with no restraints at all, but most need to be held firmly but gently to make sure no one gets hurt. Try resting your cat in the crook of your arm while holding the paw with the other hand. Another good option is to place your cat on a table and left one paw at a time. If you happen to have a particularly sociable cat, they may even lay in your lap while you do it. If you have a helper, they can hold the cat while you trim the nails, or just rub the cat's nose or give them treats.



If you aren't able to trim all 20 nails at once, it's fine. Few cats will stay patient for more than a few minutes, so take what you can get. Be sure to praise your pet for cooperating and then wait for the next opportunity, such as a catnap, to cut more of the nails.

Note: When working with a long-haired cat, be sure the clippers are clear of fur or you may accidentally pull it, which will hurt and make your cat less willing to cooperate with future nail trimming.