

# Tips for Trimming Your Cat's Nails

Trimming your cat's nails in a Fear Free manner is definitely possible, but it takes patience and time to teach properly. Nail trim stress often stems from trying to do too much at once. Breaking down the process into several components and working on each one individually makes for faster, less-stressful progress.

## Approach and setup

- Approach the cat in a nonthreatening and friendly way. Avoid head-on approaches and leaning over top. Instead, find ways to get close to the cat's level such as having the cat in an elevated area where she already hangs out (e.g., a cat tree, a perch, or the couch).
- Ensure the cat is on a nonslip surface that provides balance and stability. If using a countertop, be sure to add a cat bed, thick towel, or yoga mat underneath the cat.

## Find the right treats

- Some cats will do better being allowed to continuously lick at a spreadable treat, while other cats will do better with you handling/clipping a nail first, then immediately feeding a treat afterwards. Experiment beforehand (and re-evaluate during) to see which your cat prefers.
- Have treats ready beforehand. These could be the cat's favorite bite-sized treats, or soft, lickable treats such as Churu, canned cat food, pureed tuna, or whipped cream.
  - 🐾 If using lickable treats, you'll need something such as a spoon, spatula, small plate, or a lick mat for the cat to lick the treat off of.

## Don't rush the process

- 🐾 The following steps should be considered separate in the process of introducing your pet to nail trims.
- 🐾 Only progress to the next step if your pet is comfortable with the previous step and is not showing signs of stress such as: pinned ears, tail flicking, tucking tail and legs tightly to or beneath their body, rounded and darkened eyes, looking away, leaning away/pulling foot away, trembling, struggling, swatting, hissing, etc.
- 🐾 Each cat will progress at a different pace, so take things slowly and watch your cat carefully.
- 🐾 Don't rush the process. Even after you have completed all the below steps, don't feel compelled to trim all nails in one sitting. If you trim only one nail per session, that's a huge step.

## Accustom your cat to:

### 1. The environment

Take your cat to the nonslip or elevated surface and allow her to be in the position of her choice (standing, sitting, or lying down). Feed a treat.

### 2. The Sensation of a nail being touched

Initiate touch first where the cat is most comfortable being touched, like their cheek, head, chin, or neck. Then, while maintaining gentle touch, slide a finger or hand down to their shoulder or hip, down a leg to a paw and nail. Give a treat. Repeat several times.

### 3. The Sight of the nail clippers

Place the nail clipper on the ground or surface the cat is on and let the cat investigate or sniff it on her own. Give a treat. Bring the tool close to your cat. Give a treat.

### 4. The Sound of clipping

Clip a piece of dry pasta at a distance away from your cat's nail to simulate the sound of a nail being clipped. Give a treat. Repeat, and gradually move closer to the cat's nail.

### 5. The Sensation of a toe being gently squeezed

Again, starting where the cat is most comfortable being touched, gently slide the finger or hand to the shoulder/hip, glide down the leg, and work toward handling the cat's paws and nails while feeding treats. Progress to gently squeezing a toe to isolate the pet's nail for clipping. Give a treat. Repeat several times.

### 6. The feel of the clippers against a nail

Again, starting where the cat is most comfortable being touched and moving toward the shoulder/hip, glide gently down the leg to the foot and touch the clippers to the pet's nail. Give a treat. Repeat several times.

### 7. The Sensation of a nail being clipped

Finally, if your cat is comfortable with all previous steps, try clipping one nail. Immediately feed a treat afterwards. Proceed only if your cat is not showing signs of stress, and feed a treat after each clip.



## Additional notes

Encourage regular use of scratching posts to maintain shorter front claw length. Positive draws like wand toys, catnip, and treats can encourage paw placement on scratching posts and reinforce the desirable action of scratching.

If your pet shows moderate to severe signs of stress with nail trims, or you are unable to make progress despite taking things slowly and using high-value treats, consider consulting with one or more of the following:

- 🐾 A Fear Free Certified® animal trainer or other certified positive reinforcement trainer or certified animal behaviorist
- 🐾 A Fear Free Certified® veterinarian or a veterinary behaviorist who could prescribe a medication to give your pet before nail trims to decrease the cat's fear
- 🐾 A Fear Free Certified® groomer