



Archie's Exotic Pet Rescue

www.archiesrescue.ca

Trimming Rabbit Nails Education Sheet



Rabbit nails need to be trimmed every 2 months or so! Leaving rabbit nails to grow longer affects their mobility and comfort. Clipping a rabbit's nails can be very challenging, though. They will often kick and struggle as you try to keep them calm so you can trim their nails. If you ever feel that you can't get your rabbits nails clipped on your own, or you're afraid you'll clip the quick, there is also the option to bring your rabbit to a rescue or vet to clip your rabbit's nails for you.

WHAT YOU NEED BEFORE TRIMMING RABBIT NAILS

- Pet nail trimmers (not human nail trimmers, as they can crush rabbit nails)
- Adequate lighting/direct light source
- Clean towel
- Clean, damp cloth
- Styptic powder or cornstarch and cotton swabs
- Special treat (optional)
- An extra person—one to hold the rabbit while you trim (or to trim while you hold) is always ideal!

****Make sure to never put your bunny on his/her back! This is called trancing and is severely stressful for them!!**



STEP 1

Inspect your rabbit's nails. Rabbit nails grow at different rates, so there isn't a concrete rule on how often nails should be clipped. Generally, you should inspect your rabbit's nails once a month. If the nail curves at all, it is too long and it needs to be clipped. If you can hear your rabbit's nails hitting the floor when he hops, this is another indication that it's time to clip his nails.

Rabbits have four nails on their rear feet. On their front paws, they have the four toenails, and then the dewclaw. The dewclaw sits slightly higher than the other toenails, on the inside of the paw.

STEP 2

Calm your rabbit. If you rush the procedure, you might stress the rabbit out. If your rabbit is uneasy, he/she may panic and thrash around while you try to restrain and trim. Sit somewhere that is not easily escaped. Hold your rabbit in your lap, gently, and stroke it for a while before you start the cutting process. Wait for your rabbit to relax – it should be still, peaceful, and breathing deeply. If its eyes are closed or partially closed, it's probably comfortable.

Since rabbits are prey animals, they are most often not comfortable with being picked up. Most rabbits get used to handling over time. The more you practice picking your rabbit up properly, the more desensitized they will get (and the more comfortable you will get!). If your rabbit won't sit still in your lap, place them on a small, high surface—such as a barstool, table, or cat perch—that is covered in a towel or mat and not close to any escape routes. Proceed with the calming procedure before continuing.

STEP 3

Hold the rabbit snugly against your body. This is where having an extra person comes in handy! One person to gently hold the bunny against their body, legs out, the other to trim. If you are solo, you have a few options.

For the back legs:

- 1) You should be sitting somewhere that is not easily escaped. Cup one hand underneath the bunny's chest (behind the front arms, forefinger between the arms), and cradle their back against your body so that their butt is against your lap and up in the air, allowing their back legs to dangle up in the air for trimming.
- 2) The same as #1, but you can be standing with the rabbit's butt on a tall, towel-covered surface (such as countertop or cat perch), rather than your lap.
- 3) Lay your rabbit sideways on the edge of a tall, towel-covered surface (such as countertop or cat perch). Hold them firmly in place with one arm while trimming with the other.

For the front legs:



- 1) The front nails can usually be clipped while the bunny is relaxed on your lap.
- 2) If your rabbit is too wiggly, place the rabbit on the towel-covered edge of a countertop or other high surface for trimming.

If you are not confident in your ability to hold the rabbit still for nail trimming, you can wrap your rabbit in a clean towel. After calming your rabbit on a towel in your lap, use the towel to cover up everything but the head, making sure not to trap the ears. This will help keep the rabbit still and comfortable. Once the rabbit is wrapped up, pull out one foot at a time and clip the nails. Place each paw back inside the towel before taking out the next one.

STEP 4

Wet the paw with a clean, damp cloth. This enables the fur to be moved away from the nails for better visualization.

STEP 5

Do not cut the blood vessel inside each claw. Like dogs and cats, rabbits have a blood vessel—the "quick"—inside each of their claws. If you cut the quick, your rabbit will bleed painfully and profusely, so it is important that you identify the blood vessel before you start chopping away. The quick usually looks like a red or dark spot inside the root of the nail.

- If your rabbit has white or clear nails, you should be able to find the quick without much trouble. The blood vessel will be red or pink, so simply cut the white part of the nail above the red section.
- If your rabbit has darker-colored nails, shine a flashlight (cell phone is great for this) from under the nails to find the blood vessel. The quick should be a visible dark spot inside an otherwise translucent nail. Make note of the quick's location, and don't cut the nail at the dark quick spot.
- If you still can't find the quick, find a location near the end of the nail, and gently press the clippers without cutting. If your rabbit tries to pull his paw back or struggles, you're probably pressing the blood vessel. Try again closer to the tip. If the rabbit doesn't react, it's probably safe to start cutting from that point.

STEP 6

Cut the claws. After you have located the quick, clip the white or translucent tip of each claw. Before you clip, apply a slight pressure as a "test clip" — if the rabbit recoils its paw, there's a good chance that you're about to clip the blood vessel.

- Remember to clip the dewclaw on each of the front paws. If the dewclaw grows too long, it may get caught on something and hurt your rabbit.

Take a break between feet if your rabbit is struggling or the procedure is taking a while. This



is especially important if you are using a towel for restraint – unwrap your rabbit for a few minutes to keep them from overheating. You can always trim one paw (or nail!) a day! Try using treats as a reward to make your rabbit more comfortable.

FIRST AID

If necessary, use styptic powder or cornstarch to help stop bleeding. Mistakes happen, even if you've done your best to locate the blood vessels in the nail. Rabbits are prone to sudden movements, and you may accidentally lop off more than you plan to. Don't worry – act quickly and calmly, and the cut will heal. Dip a moist cotton swab into the styptic powder or cornstarch and apply pressure to the bleeding nail.

