

Tutorial-How to Trim Your Reptile's Nails!

Many different species or groups of reptiles, including many lizards, as well as chelonians such as turtles and tortoises, have hardened, keratinized nails or claws (much like we humans do in that they are comprised of the same material, keratin). These claws or nails develop and grow throughout the reptile's lifetime, and, depending on the species and their natural history, can help them dig or burrow more efficiently, as well as better be able to swim and/or climb.

When we keep these amazing animals in captivity, or as pets, however, there may be some cases where their nails or claws will need to periodically be trimmed or clipped. In the long-term, providing the correct and suitable enclosure, as well as habitat and husbandry, utilizing the right substrates, and providing additional furnishings within the enclosure such as slate rocks or other foraging activities, can help keep your pet reptile's claws trimmed and worn down naturally over time.

Oftentimes, however, and in the absence of these optimal conditions in captivity, there come times and cases where we may need to cut or trim our reptile's claws for our handling comfort. So how does one know when their reptile's nails or claws might need a trim? How can you tell? This will depend quite a bit on each species, as well as other factors and considerations.

Some groups of animals, such as many aquatic or semi-aquatic turtles for example, will naturally have long fore-claws as a form of their sexual dimorphism, or physical differences between the sexes in which male turtles naturally have longer claws than females, and in some of these cases, we do not want to normally consider clipping their nails. In many reptiles, we may also start to see physical deformities or abnormalities manifest as well, especially in chelonians, such as obviously misshapen or overgrown nails, or tilting of the toes and feet to one side as opposed to being straight and upright. Also look for curling nails, leading to their inability to place their entire foot on the ground, especially in chelonians. Snakes are also even easier, as they do not have feet, claws, or nails to clip, although some groups such as boas and pythons have tiny, remnant vestigial spurs near the base of their tails. Do not clip those at all, as they do not tend to overgrow, and are supposed to be there!

If, however, your reptile, such as bearded dragon, iguana, monitor or tegu, blue tongued skink, or other lizard or other reptile becomes more "painful" to handle and interact with in terms of scratches to us, and/or they seem to be having a more difficult time moving or walking around without their claws becoming caught in the substrate or other objects, it may be time to consider a nail trim! Luckily, doing so can be relatively easy as long as a few considerations are kept in mind!

In this tutorial, we will cover how to trim your reptile's nails!

Materials Needed:

- One, two, or more people, depending on the size, species, and type of animal with nails to be clipped.

-One pair of nail clippers or stainless steel cuticle trimmers. These do not need to be fancy or expensive, and can include a pair of human nail clippers, puppy or dog/kitten or cat nail clippers, or other types of nail clippers.



-Other tools may also be used, as needed, including file sets and/or Dremel tools or sanding bits. Using a nail file can be more tedious and time consuming, but can work if your reptile has the patience. These are best used on larger animals where other clippers might not be large or strong enough to clip nails from these animals due to the size and/or thickness of their claws.

-One bottle of iodine or styptic powder, in the event of bleeding or over-trimming of the nails.

-Other supplies: Skewer, white colored pencil or other non-toxic marking tool or writing utensil.

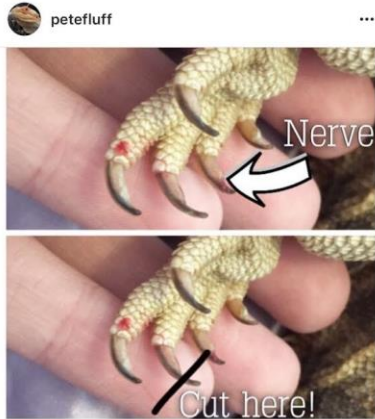
Steps for Nail Trimming



**Mis-shapen toes and foot associated with needing a nail trim, left, normal, well postured foot and toes, right. © Stock photos and Beardie Bungalow.com*

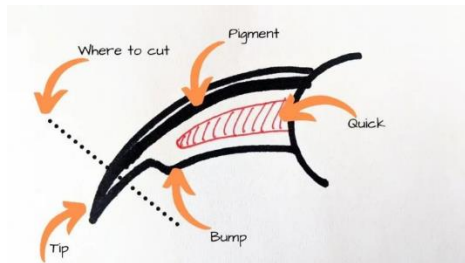
1. The first step will be ensuring that your reptile can be safely and appropriately handled and restrained, depending on the species and type of animal, and is calm and not thrashing or moving about

excessively. We want to prevent undue or excess stress and injury for both the animal, and to us as much as possible. This is where two or more people may be required in some cases with larger reptiles. Holding your reptile still, and keeping each of their feet steady are the goals of this first step. Covering your reptile with a blanket or towel may also help them feel more secure as well.



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2. The second step will be to examine your reptile's claws or nails to look for where the nerve and blood vessels are. This might be easier to determine in species with lighter colored nails as opposed to darker colored claws. However, these areas should still be able to be seen upon closer examination. As with the nails of many different animals, the "Quick" is the lighter colored area of the nail containing these more sensitive blood vessels and nerve endings. Cutting onto, or too close to the quick will be much more likely to cause pain, discomfort, and stress for your reptile.



*The "Quick" area of a claw or nail. © BeardieBungalow.com

3. If the clipped nail begins to bleed, or if there is bleeding, one can gently dab the area with iodine or use the styptic powder in order to prevent further infection. Wait several minutes for the bleeding to subside and for the iodine to dry, before returning your reptile to its enclosure. **For most reptiles, only the tips of the nail should be clipped, *not* as far down as possible, as might be done with dogs and cats.**

4. Alternatively, if one is not experienced or comfortable enough to clip or trim their pet reptile's claws or nails on one's own, your reptile or other exotic animal veterinarian will likely be able to, reptile specialty stores, or other more experienced hobbyists, enthusiasts, or individuals in one's area.

5. Another technique which may work well, and which involves less restraint and stress to the animal, is allowing the animal to sit atop a screen enclosure top (or similar material or objects), and clipping only the nail tips which protrude through the screen. This of course depends on one's experience level, and the individual temperaments and dispositions of each animal.

And there one has it! Trimming or clipping your reptile's nails or claws can often be a relatively quick process once one gains a little practice and experience in doing so, and knows what to look for. But how often should a reptile's nails be trimmed following this? Generally, your reptile's claws or nails should be trimmed and monitored at least weekly. Ideally however, and over the long-term, providing adequate and abrasive substrates in your reptile's enclosure, as well as other objects and furnishings to help them better and more naturally wear down their claws on their own should be among the considerations made by the keeper or pet owner for the overall long term health and happiness of their pet reptile.