



## HOW TO TRIM CHICKEN CLAWS

When a chicken doesn't have hard surfaces to scratch against, the nails continue to grow until they curl, and then the chicken can't walk properly.

Dorkings, Faverolles, Houdans, Sultans, and Silkie chickens all have five toes, with the extra toe growing above the hind toe and curving upward. In most cases this fifth toe never touches the ground, therefore has no opportunity to wear down. Nails that don't naturally wear down need to be periodically trimmed. Cocks may need to have their claws trimmed to prevent injury to hens during breeding, and chickens groomed for showing must have their nails neatly trimmed to successfully compete.

At the center of each claw is a quick or soft tissue nourished by a blood supply. As the claw grows longer, so does the quick. When the claw is shortened, the quick recedes. To avoid drawing blood, trim an overly long toenail in stages, a little every few days, allowing time for the quick to recede until the nail is the proper length. Then keep it clipped properly short.

Clean the chicken's feet by soaking them in warm water prior to trimming, to soften nails so they are easier to clip without

splitting. Cleaning the toes also makes the quick easier to see.

Use a pair of pet toenail clippers or human nail trimmers to trim the nail ends, and finish by filing away sharp corners. Trim a tiny bit at a time — no more than about one-eighth inch — to avoid snipping into the quick. After every snip, inspect the cut end of the nail. If it changes color, you're getting too close to the quick. Stop trimming and give the quick a few days to recede before continuing. If you accidentally draw blood, stop the bleeding by applying an astringent such as witch hazel, styptic powder, or alum, or encourage rapid clotting by dipping the wounded toe in flour or cornstarch. If bleeding continues after two applications, apply gentle pressure with the tip of your finger for about a minute, repeating the pressure applied until bleeding stops.

How often claws need trimming depends on how fast they grow. And their rate of growth depends on the environment and the time of year. Trim your chickens' nails as often as necessary to keep them even with the bottom of the toe. A nail that grows long and thin and begins to curl is overdue for a trim.

*Original story by Gail Damerow, Backyard Poultry June/July 2015*