

Lizard Nail Trimming

My lizard's nails are getting long. How do you go about cutting or trimming them?

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My bearded dragon's nails are getting long. How do you go about cutting them, and will the reptile pet shop or vet be best bet?

For the first time, I would recommend taking your beardie in to see a herp vet (especially if it hasn't seen a vet before). This way, your vet can record its weight, run a fecal parasite examination (if this hasn't yet been performed) and your beardie can get a clean bill of health. You might want to consider having some baseline blood work performed to ensure that it is healthy on the inside. It is a good investment.

Then while you're there, ask your vet to show you how to trim back the nails and what to do if you should accidentally hit the "quick," which is actually a blood vessel and nerve that run the length of the living nail tissue. He or she may be able to provide you with a small amount of blood clotting gel (I use and recommend Cauter-Gel (Dr. Gold's, Mensa Products, Ft. Lauderdale, FL 33335-2809, 954-525-1133). I like this better than powders that can burn. Cauter-Gel also has a broad-spectrum antimicrobial in it, which I like, as it can help prevent infectious organisms from entering the site.

There is an art to properly clipping any pet's nails. One must learn where the blood vessel ends and just clip off the dead tissue at the tips of the nails (the equivalent of our fingernails at the tip, which are normally white and painless to trim).

I have more concern about clipping the nails on climbing lizards, as they rely on their claws for swiftly moving about in the branches. Ground lizards don't seem to care much if their claws are trimmed, as long as the process causes them no undue distress or pain. This is why it is so important to learn the correct way to hold your lizard and how to clip the claws properly. It probably will take two people to safely clip your beardie: one to hold it and one to do the procedure.

Once you have learned how to clip claws, if you are comfortable with the procedure, you can do follow-up nail trims yourself, once you purchase a quality pair of nail clippers (I usually use bird claw clippers sold at pet retailers).

Good luck with the grooming. Some pet retailers also have experienced herpers working there who would be able to show you the proper way to trim claws. Thanks for writing in and asking rather than just forging ahead and trying to cut them yourself! It's always better to be prepared!