

## Hoof Care Notes by Margaret Timms

**AGE:** Any age, the younger the better, whether they "need" trimming or not. Pigs hate to be restrained, so if you can do the hoof care yourself you'll save on stress for you and piggy and save in vet costs. Very little needs to be done on a baby, but do a little of everything to accustom him to the procedure. And do it often.

**FOOT:** Consists of four toes - two primary hooves and two dewclaws (I think of these as the "high heels"). All four toes are surrounded by a hard nail on the sides and front. There are nerves and blood vessels in the hooves and dewclaws, so keep this in mind when working on piggy. There is a soft pad on the bottom of the hoof which can become quite hard on an outdoor pig, depending on the terrain, and usually stays quite soft on an indoor piggy.

**TOOLS:** Nail file for acrylic nails or emery board (I don't like metal nail files for this job), very small pair spring loaded side cutters (aka diagonal cut mini plier) or toenail clippers (not the pinching ones). Hoof trimmers - I like scissor-shaped ones with blunted ends, and a spring in between the handles, rather than the horse hoof clipper. Jaki Beshur has one that does an excellent job. Many different tools will do a good job. Try to find ones that are easy to replace that you are comfortable with.

**RITUAL:** I always made a ritual out of this. I put a comforter on the floor or lawn and lay down on my tummy to work on hooves. This was more comfortable for me than crouching, and piggy felt less threatened. Piggy always knew he was going to get TLC and a tummy rub (or several) and a treat or two. All I had to do was get the comforter out and his mohawk would go up and he'd stagger over to the comforter and collapse in a heap. I've worked for up to 30 minutes at a sitting.

**TUMMY RUB:** The easiest way to start is to get piggy down for a tummy rub. When he's good and relaxed, starting with the front feet, gently take a foot into your hand. Don't apply any pressure at first. Massage VERY lightly with thumb and forefinger on the pads, hooves and leg, as though you were giving a light foot rub to a sprite. If piggy yanks foot away and heads to the hills, be patient . . . you may have to start even gentler, just resting a finger on the hoof for a few seconds. If he pulls away, let go, but don't give up. It may take several sessions before you can get piggy to let you hold a foot. When piggy is comfortable with being held for a few moments, take the file and try a few rasps on the end of one of the primary hooves. Use a fine emery board or acrylic nail file at first. It's a good idea to talk to piggy in a soothing voice while you're working. Don't forget to keep the tummy rub going. Don't try to use any kind of clipper until piggy is comfortable with the filing. Hooves and dewclaws on a baby can be kept trim by filing only, but try a few small clips now and then to get him used to it.

**DEWCLAWS:** Should be blunted and shortened. In a baby pig just file the sides and a little underneath, maybe trim a tiny bit off the end then sand smooth. In older pigs, trim and file along sides. I use tiny side

cutters or toenail clippers to loosen off the dried flaky nail underneath until it is no longer flaky like slate but is more the consistency of fresh coconut meat. Cleaning this area out also gives you a guide as to how much to trim off the sides. Then nip back the sides and blunt the end. Smooth carefully afterwards with an emery board or nail file, blunt all the edges. In an older pig the dewclaw may start to flake and peel on the top or top of the sides. You can gently smooth this with a file, it seems to help prevent major splits. Every once in a while it's a good idea to rub some hoof oil into the foot, hoof, dewclaws and pads. This helps keep the area supple and prevents cracks.

**HOOVES:** Same basic procedure as dewclaws, except I never had to clean underneath as this was usually worn down smooth enough, I only clipped the front and a little on the sides once in a while. Sand as for dewclaws. The bottom of the pad and hoof should be flat. I never clipped between the primary toes on the inside edge of the hoof - usually just filed it smooth and took off any sharp edges.

When nipping off small bites, watch out for any sign of pink. Then stop. Stop a slice sooner on the rest of the dewclaw or hoof. Don't leave any rough edges as these can cut piggy's belly (or your legs).

**HOOF SPLITTING:** Sometimes you may notice a split starting in the hoof. Clean the area carefully with betadine or some other antiseptic. Using a nail file or emery board, file a fine line above the split as though you were putting the top on a T. This will help prevent the split from running (like ladders in a nylon). Finish off with an antibiotic/antifungal ointment. Using hoof oil regularly will help prevent splits.

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