

Get the facts before you decide about de-clawing

The list of hot button topics seems endless, running the gamut from assisted suicide to cloning. These issues inspire intense discussion, setting people off with varying levels of opinion.

Certain issues polarize opinions to the extreme. Abortion. Gun control. Which Darrin was the best on *Jeopardy!*? These issues usually don't inspire discussion, just argument; each side with strong opinions and valid points, but with little likelihood of consensus.

In veterinary medicine, de-clawing cats fits this mold. No doubt about it, de-clawing has gotten a bad name. Like most things, when you break it down, it sounds terrible. The furthest bone of the toe is removed, eliminating the nail that grows from it, and the incision closed with a tissue glue or suture.

Remember, we're not talking about the Three Stooges tying one end of the string around the toenail and the other end around the doorknob. Vets perform this procedure with

surgical skill, using techniques to decrease the time anesthetized, and the pain involved.

PAIN

Most owners deciding on whether to de-claw worry about the pain of the surgery. Nobody wants to see their critter ouchy.

Trust me, vets don't want to see a patient in pain. Not only does it break your heart (most vets kind of like animals a little), but it hurts your reputation. Pain is the enemy.

New pain control protocols help dramatically. Many vets place patches containing Fentanyl on the cats. These patches slowly release a controlled amount of pain medication into the animal wearing it over a few days.

Since implementing these patches in surgery protocol over the last few years, discomfort following a de-claw surgery seems greatly reduced.

I watch kittens as they wake up after the surgery, and they seem mellow. Managing pain allows for a better, smoother recovery from anesthetic, and aids in more rapid healing, as they tend to leave the paws alone.

For an owner getting their beloved kitty back, having their pet jump up on the couch without ouchies within a day

or two makes de-clawing more acceptable.

Some argue the pain patches hide the pain. They do. They argue de-claws hurt and thus should never be performed. Ignoring kitten owners to avoid the dread surgery, so their kitten can grow and live life as a full cat, with claws on all four paws.

That's perfectly fine. I never begrudge anyone who doesn't want their cat de-clawed. Absolutely great. But don't make the decision without knowing the facts. That's how you hurt your pet.

THINKING AHEAD

Too many times I will have a young couple come into my clinic with a new kitten they have decided to never de-claw. The kitten will never scratch their things, they say, and they only own older things anyway — worn furniture the cat wouldn't hurt by scratching.

Remember, the life of a cat takes you to the next stage of life. A cat you get as a child will be there (God willing) until you are a young adult. If you get a kitten in your early 20s, you'll be pushing hard at middle age when the cat is elderly.

The point is, maybe you don't have nice things now, but will you later? You love your

kitten, but when the cat starts destroying expensive furniture, decisions often don't go the cat's way.

Studies have shown the number one cause of cat deaths in American annually comes from euthanasia because of behavioral problems, such as clawing furniture. I often have to speak to people with older cats about de-clawing, to avoid that final decision.

De-clawing an older cat does irritate me. Along with being more difficult, the procedure takes much longer, and certainly can have a significant amount of blood, which you rarely see in younger de-claws.

The big problem comes after. The patches help, but these cats can be very uncomfortable for a while after the surgery. Hence I tell everyone with a kitten to really think about the de-claw. Sixteen weeks old is better than 1 year, which is better than 2, and so on. If I never do an adult cat de-claw again, I would be quite happy.

I am not saying getting your kitten de-clawed is right for everyone — certainly not true — but think it through before you dismiss the idea completely for moral reasons when your kitten is reasonably young enough to get the procedure.

If you decide to have the procedure done or not, it's wonderful.

But make a good choice that fits your cat and your current and future life.

Incidentally, rarely should cats get a four-foot de-claw. They scratch with the front paws, not the backs. Sure, they can damage vinyl or leather, or skin, when they jump off and their claws dig in, but realistically getting all four done is unnecessary.

By the way — Dick York was by far the better Darrin.

Take Home Message: Not everyone with a young kitten should get their pet de-clawed, but that is when you should consider it. The surgery has become much more pain-free over the years, so don't be scared off without all the facts. Talk with your vet, and make the best decision now, to help avoid a difficult decision down the line.

Dr. Brad Davis is the medical director for the VCA of Garden City, 2085 Inkster Road, Garden City, MI 48135. Feel free to write him with questions and comments. He is also one of the hosts of the nationally syndicated radio show *Animal Talk*. Visit the Web site at www.AnimalTalkRadio.com. You can send e-mail questions or comments to DrBrad@animaltalkradio.com.

HOME CALENDAR

Animal fair
The Michigan Humane Society, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary this year, invites animal lovers to a week-end of family fun at the Animal Care Fair.

The fair will take place 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday-Sunday, Aug. 24-25, on the front lawn of the Southfield Civic Center, 26000 Evergreen, between 10 and 11 Mile.

Admission is free. Free parking will be available directly across Evergreen, and free shuttles will transport people, purchases and adopted pets. For more information, call (866) MIHUMAN between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Thursday-Friday.

Now in its 11th year, the event will feature colorful tents, discounted pet supplies, refreshments and animal team performances.

Wearables for adults and children, and unusual gift items for animals and animal lovers, will be for sale at the MHS.

Visitors can pick up advice on pet behavior and health care, as well as tips on living in harmony with wildlife. Someone looking for a new puppy, kitten, dog, cat or rabbit can find a new furry companion from among hundreds of adoptable animals.

The fair is sponsored by Pet Supplies "Plus," the City of Southfield, and radio partners WHIC and 106.7.

Family Day
Now through Saturday, Aug. 24, discount coupons for Art Van Family Day at the Michigan State Fair are available at all Art Van Furniture stores.

The coupons offer free children's entry with a paid adult admission for Aug. 24 at the fair.

For Michigan State Fair information, call (313) 369-8200.

Kids Castle
Celebrate the fifth birthday of the Art Van Furniture Kids Castle 1-3 p.m. Sunday, Aug. 25, at Art Van Furniture, 6500 14 Mile in Warren (phone 586) 939-2100. Kids Castle is a supervised play area for youngsters in select stores. Children are invited to Sunday's event in Warren to meet the Kids Castle characters, sing happy birthday and receive a free Flicker the Dragon magnet.

Starr House Museum
The Orson Starr House Museum, 3123 N. Main, one block south of 13 Mile in Royal Oak, has an open house the second Sunday of each month. The house was built in 1845. Donations appreciated. Call (248) 588-7563.

GARDEN CALENDAR

Landscape
English Gardens conducts free gardening seminars for the public 10 a.m. Saturdays at its five metro Detroit stores, including locations in West Bloomfield (phone 248) 851-7506, Royal Oak (phone 248) 260-9500 and Dearborn Heights (phone 313) 278-4433.

Do-it-yourself Landscaping: Selecting trees and shrubs will be the topic of the Aug. 24 program. For more information, call (800) 335-GROW or visit www.englishgardens.com.

Winter-hardy roses
Congress has declared 2002 the Year of the Rose. Roger and Nancy Lindsey, owners of Great Lakes Roses, are celebrating with a series of programs 1 p.m. Saturdays that will enable Michigan gardeners to succeed with

roses this summer. Each presentation lasts about an hour. Great Lakes Roses is at 49875 Willow Road in Farmington Hills. The Great Lakes Rose Society and Sumpter (Belleville) roads in Sumpter Township, just south of Belleville, Call (734) 461-1230 or visit www.GreatLakesRoses.com.

Practical tips
The Michigan School of Gardening presents specialty and just-for-fun classes at The Community House, 380 S. Bates in Birmingham.

They include Practical Garden Tips, 10 a.m. to noon Wednesday, Aug. 28 (\$20). To register, call The Community House at (248) 644-5832.

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HIGH HOPES CONTEST

Sponsored by Observer & Eccentric and English Gardens

Submit your entries by 5 p.m. on Sunday, August 25, 2002, to the High Hopes Contest, c/o English Gardens, 2085 Inkster Road, Garden City, MI 48135. The contest is open to all residents of Michigan who are 18 years of age or older. The contest is open to all residents of Michigan who are 18 years of age or older.

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2. Prizes will be awarded to the winner of each category. The winner will receive a cash prize of \$1,000. The runner-up will receive a cash prize of \$500. The third-place winner will receive a cash prize of \$250.

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Need help?



Has your home held up over this unusually hot summer? Does your lawn need help? Don't miss our annual Fall Home Improvement section coming the week of September 8. You'll find some exciting ideas and valuable suggestions.

To advertise in this popular section, call one of the numbers below:

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