

## **Procedure For Dewclaw Removal** by Rene Sauser

**Have ready the following items and read this procedure through completely before starting:**

- 1. Small pair of scissors, slightly dull** - dull scissors tend to pinch some of the smaller blood vessels closed during the cutting process as opposed to a clean sharp cut which can bleed more. Disinfect the scissors with an alcohol pad before proceeding.
- 2. Alcohol swabs** - one for each puppy.
- 3. Silver Nitrate sticks** - one for each puppy. We have a client who is a doctor and he orders these for us. Check around, mail order medical supply houses will sell this item to anyone I think. These are the same sticks doctors use to cauterize severe nose bleeds. They do sting the puppy when applied and should be applied with care as they basically perform a chemical reaction which "burns" the open wound to stop the bleeding.
- 4. Latex gloves** for both 8 and 9 - Silver Nitrate stains skin, nails, clothing, anything it comes in contact with an ugly brown color, but you won't know it until several hours later.
- 5. Distilled or sterile water**, about a Tablespoon full.
- 6. A few sheets of newspaper**, enough to line the whelping box with a single layer.
- 7. Puppies with dewclaws**
- 8. A puppy holder** - preferably someone who is not squeamish.
- 9. A dewclaw cutter** - preferably someone who sees well enough, has a steady hand, and is also not squeamish.

Set your work area up near the whelping box and get everything ready before shutting mom outside. Perform the procedure when the pups are 72 hours old. Do not perform the procedure on weak or sick puppies. If the puppies are not thriving wait a day or two longer or let the vet do it later.

Once the work area is set up, shut mom outside, place a couple of flat sheets of newspaper in the bottom of the whelping box. The newspaper allows you to quickly determine if any puppy starts bleeding again after the procedure.

Don the latex gloves.

Have the puppy holder pick up a puppy and cradle the puppy with its back resting in the palms of both hands and its head pointed up towards the finger tips. See Figure 1.

Then, taking the left thumb, apply pressure to the inside of the puppy's right forearm by pressing the thumb in the groove between the two bones in the forearm and using the first forefinger to apply pressure to the back side of the forearm. Using the right thumb apply the same pressure to the puppy's left forearm. See Figure 2.

This pressure is gently suppressing blood flow to both forepaws. While the puppy holder continues to apply pressure, the cutter first swabs each foreleg with an alcohol pad and then removes both dewclaws including the entire digit by clipping with the scissors cutting from inside the dewclaw to outside the dewclaw and parallel and close to the forearm. See Figure 2. It is essential to completely remove the digit at the joint where it connects to the forearm in order to prevent bone spurs or the dewclaw from growing back. When correctly removed, there will be a bare patch of tissue exposed that is no more than 1/8<sup>th</sup> to 3/16<sup>th</sup> of an inch long by 1/16<sup>th</sup> of an inch wide.

While the puppy holder continues to apply pressure, dip the tip of a silver nitrate stick lightly in the distilled water to activate it. Then roll the stick lightly over the wound on each leg to seal it. Wait 10 seconds while the holder continues to apply steady, gentle pressure and keep the squirming puppy from rubbing its face with the silver nitrate on its forelegs.

**Note:** Some puppies do not bleed as long as pressure is applied properly for approximately 30 seconds after cutting. If this is the case, try not using the silver nitrate sticks, simply place the puppy back on the newspaper and observe for several minutes for any sign of bleeding.

Release the pressure and check to see that no bleeding is evident.

Put the puppy in the box and repeat the process with the rest of the litter.

Monitor the newspaper as each puppy is placed back in the box to ensure that none have started to bleed again.

After the last puppy is placed in the box, clean up the work area and monitor the newspaper for two more minutes. If all is well, pick up the newspaper and let mom back in.

If a puppy should begin to bleed again, simply have the puppy holder apply pressure again and re-cauterize the wound with a silver nitrate stick and hold the puppy, continuing to apply pressure a bit longer. You can try blowing on the wound a bit to help dry it more quickly.

If you are familiar with the procedure beforehand and organized in the setup of your work area you will be able to move much more quickly. We can remove the dewclaws from a litter of six in less than 10 minutes. The less time it takes to finish the litter, the sooner mom can get back in and things return to normal.

The single most significant thing about this process is the application of pressure. Provided you do not have a problem with Von Willebrand's Disease or some other clotting factor problem that makes your puppies excessive bleeders, the pressure will be adequate to slow, if not entirely suppress bleeding. We have had occasion where pressure was adequate to allow natural clotting to occur without the use of the silver nitrate sticks at all.

The second most important thing is the silver nitrate sticks. Before switching to those we used Stop Quik styptic powder. The problem with styptic powder is that it can absorb moisture from the atmosphere which renders it completely ineffective. When I first started helping Dennis in this procedure I used to just present a puppy to him, no pressure applied, while he cut and then madly tried to stop the bleeding with styptic powder. If the powder was damp, his frustration level rose quickly as the pup continued to fuss and bleed. We both hated to perform the procedure and it took up to half an hour for us to do 6 puppies.

At the same time that we got the silver nitrate sticks it occurred to me that I could help slow the bleeding if nothing else by simply applying some pressure. It now forces Denny to work around my hands a bit, since, while applying pressure, I can't turn the puppy to face him as easily. But, what a difference it made! We no longer look upon the task with trepidation. We no longer are stressed out doing it and both the puppies and mom probably sense that. I'm sure, that with use of applied pressure, even stop quick would be adequate now, but we still like the silver nitrate sticks. Not to sound hard hearted, because I'm not, but I now feel the same way about dewclaw removal as I do about nail clipping, in fact, I have had many occasions where blood letting during nail clipping was a hundred times that of dewclaw removal. Probably what makes dewclaw removal difficult is the fact that they are so little and so precious.

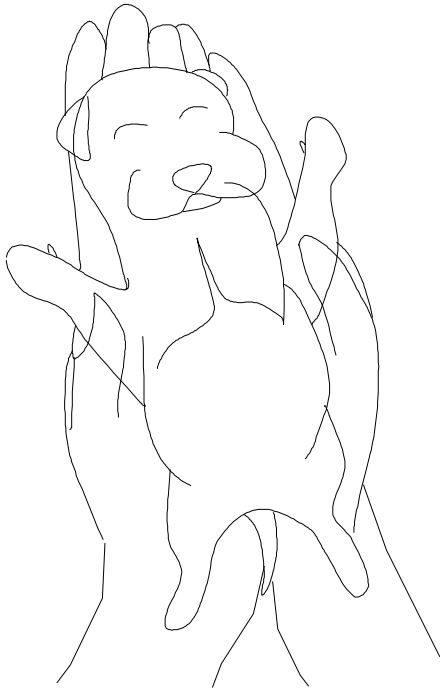


Figure 1

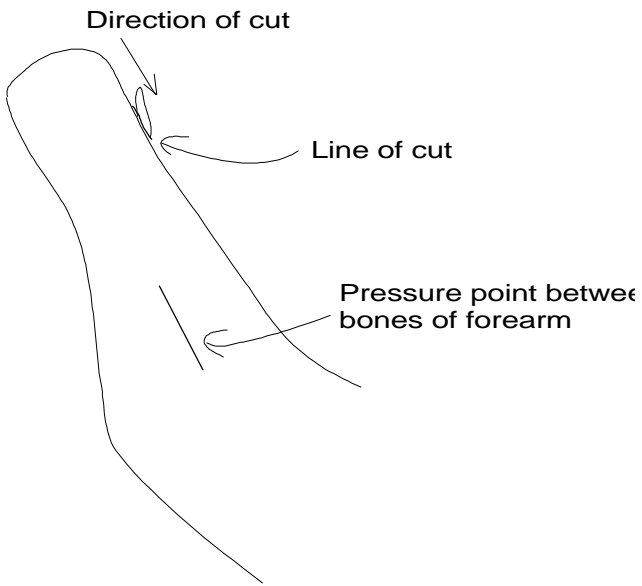


Figure 2