



## Trimming a Dairy Heifer's Feet

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The hooves of calves, and mature cows as well, sometimes grow long and out of natural shape. This condition is unattractive and detrimental to the animal's posture. Long hooves are more subject to cracking, which may result in lameness. Cracked hooves are subject to more infections, such as foot rot, and they also cause undue strain to be placed on the legs and pasterns of the animal.

The condition can be remedied by trimming the hoof back to a desirable length and shape. It is very important that the feet of a show animal be in good condition. Properly trimmed feet help to correct faults in the legs and the animal's posture.

The show heifer's feet should be trimmed several weeks before the show so that if the feet are tender after trimming, they will have time to get tough. It is always a good idea to get this type of job done well in advance of the time you are putting the finishing touches on the training of your animal.

However, remember that a poor job of hoof trimming may be worse than no trimming at all.

### Materials and Steps

The materials needed for trimming feet include a rope halter, one 20 foot long rope, one five to six foot long rope, a hoof rasp, a sharp wood chisel, a wooden mallet or hammer, hoof nippers, and a wood surface on which the animal can stand (a wide board will do).

The first step is to clean the animal's foot. The hoof must be clean in order to see what needs to be done. A stiff bristle brush may be used for this purpose and, if necessary, a wet rag to wipe away any dirt.

Next, allow the animal to stand on a hard, flat surface so that you can observe the job to be done. Are the toes too long? Does the animal stand flatly on her feet, or are the bottoms of the hooves rounded? Figure 1 show a foot that needing trimming and one that is properly trimmed. The foot on the right is too long and rounded on the bottom. When trimmed correctly, it should look like the one on the left.



Figure 1. A trimmed and untrimmed hoof.

The wood chisel can be used to trim off excess length on toes. First, stand the animal on a wood surface (this prevents dulling the chisel). Chisel off small pieces of toe in order to avoid cutting too deeply. The chisel should be at least one inch wide and must be sharp.

On another toe, use the hoof nippers. You will have to pick up the calf's foot to use the nippers. Stand beside the calf, facing the opposite direction from her. Put your knee under the calf's brisket to give her support while you lift her foot. Pick the foot up gently and not too high. Bend the foot at the ankle and have a helper use the nippers to trim the toe.

The rear feet can be handled in this manner if the calf is gentle. Use some precaution against cutting too deeply. You will not need both the hoof nippers and the chisel, and the chisel may be easier to use.

Use the hoof rasp to smooth up the freshly cut surfaces and to remove the final necessary bit of hoof (be sure the ends of the toes do not touch when the animal stands). Quite often this is all that needs to be done.

The calf should stand flatly on her feet, and most of her weight should be supported on the outside portion of the hoof. If this is not the case, the inside portion of each toe should be trimmed. This can usually be done with the rasp. Sometimes it becomes necessary to use a hoof knife or sharp pocketknife for this purpose. Whatever tool is used, precaution should be taken to avoid cutting the hands by keeping them behind the cutting edge. Caution must also be taken not to cut too

deep into the hoof. You will observe that the surface color of the freshly cut hoof changes as you cut deeper. Stop when you observe a light pink color.

### Throwing the Calf

It sometimes becomes necessary to throw a calf to trim her feet. This can be easily and safely accomplished by using a rope hitch as illustrated in Figure 2.

The loop around the neck should be by a bowline or some other knot that will not slip tight. Your helper can hold the halter while you get behind the animal and pull on the rope. When the two loops around the calf's body become tight, she loses control of her legs and lies down. Caution should be used to prevent her from lying down on any sharp objects, such as rocks, tools, etc.

The calf will not get up as long as the loops around her body remain tight. The feet may be tied together for added safety and ease.

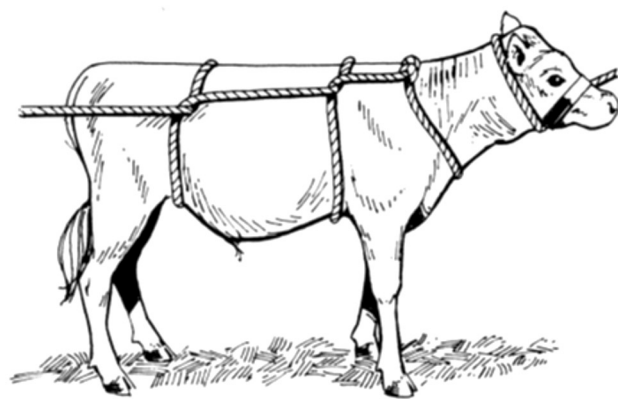


Figure 2. Example of a rope hitch.

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