

# Cats Scratching Furniture

Basic Feline Care



## CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Boots the cat has shredded your couch, and you don't dare to get a new one because you're afraid he'll wreck it too. What to do? Short of getting rid of the cat, there are ways to control this annoying habit.

### Why do cats scratch?

Scratching is instinctive behavior; in fact, cats **need** to scratch because it meets their psychological and physical needs. Even if there are no other cats in the household, your cat will stake out his or her territory. Cats have scent glands in their feet, and deposit this scent while scratching. You can't smell their scent, but other cats can. Kitty may also choose your favorite chair (that has your scent on it) to scratch, marking your territory as his. Visual evidence of scratching also alerts other cats that this cat has marked his territory. Scratching also removes old claw husks and helps cats keep fit by exercising their leg muscles.

### Provide Scratching posts

A cat is not as easy to train as a dog, but it can be done. Provide attractive scratching posts (or other type of cat furniture), and then teach him to use them. In the outdoors, cats will rip and tear at coarse tree bark and other solid, rough surfaces. Carpet and upholstery become the indoor alternative if that's all there is to choose from.

Every cat is different, and some surfaces will appeal to him more than others. Try a variety of cat furniture. Some suggestions: sisal rope, corrugated cardboard, braided cloth, cotton rope, and strong carpet (the backing may be better than the front!) If you choose carpet, avoid berber or deep looped styles, because kitty's claws can get caught and he could be injured trying to get away. Also, it will be harder for him to figure out which carpet he can scratch and which is off limits.

The scratching post should be solid on a heavy base so he won't pull it over, and tall or long enough for him to stretch out while he scratches. Place the posts near couches, stairs, drapery and other attractive scratching places. Place one in any room where he will spend a lot of time. Prevent access to other rooms while training if you are not able to supervise. Entice him to use the posts by luring him with a chase toy (like a fishing pole with a feather at the end) or rubbing the post with catnip. Most important: praise him when he scratches the post! He may also respond to treats, petting and playtime near the post.

### Equipment needed

- Scratching posts and cat furniture covered with assorted textures
- Odor remover
- Toenail clippers
- Catnip
- Pet repellent sprays
- Cat toys
- Scat Mat
- Sticky Paws or Kitty Korners double faced adhesive strips

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**Problem Solving** If your cat has already established favorite scratching locations, put a new post nearby, and distract him from the old spots with toys and treats. To make the old places less appealing, use a combination of methods:

Remove scent marks and visible scratches. A product like Nature's Miracle® will remove odors from furniture and carpet. Cover scratched areas with fabric to hide the damage and spray with pet repellent. Otherwise, cats will return to the same places to refresh the visual evidence of scratching. Wood gouges can be made invisible with matching stain. Double-faced tape (such as Sticky paws or Kitty Korners, both available at PETCO) on the corners of the couch makes scratching extremely unpleasant!

If you are around when Kitty misbehaves, yell a loud "No!" and make him quit. A spritz with water will also get your point across quickly. Then distract him and take him to the scratching post. Don't try to force him. Cats don't have an inborn desire to please or obey you, so you need to make him think it's his idea! Be sure to use a happy tone of voice and make only good things happen at the approved scratching location.

Environmental corrections are good deterrents when you can't be there to prevent destruction. A small can (soda can) with a few pennies propped on the arm of the chair, sticky tape, aluminum foil, Scat Mats® or cat-repellent spray all correct Kitty without you getting the blame.

**Prevention** Clip Kitty's toenails to remove the "hook" at the end and make scratching less rewarding. Your vet or groomer can show you how. Always use sharp clippers made for pets, and clip off the ends carefully. Don't cut back so far you cut the quick, which will hurt Kitty. Cats can learn to accept nail clipping. Go slow, and start with just one nail a night, with lots of rewards and affection. Squeeze the toe to extend the nail before cutting.

For indoor cats, plastic nail caps are available from your veterinarian. These last 6 to 8 weeks and sometimes come in fun colors. The caps are dull at the end, so that scratching doesn't accomplish much. The behavior doesn't go away, but the damage ends.

Declawing is a last resort method to consider. This surgical procedure requires anesthesia and careful follow-up on your part. The end of each toe, including the nail, is amputated. The cat's feet must be bandaged, and he may avoid the litter box at first because his paws hurt. Declawed cats can never go outside again. They may not be able to defend themselves or escape easily up a tree.

**Suggested Reading** Cats For Dummies by Gina Spadafori and Paul Diono, DVM, DACVIM  
The Complete Idiot's Guide to Living With a Cat by Carolyn Janik and Ruth Rejnes  
ASPCA's Complete Cat Care  
Shelter Cats by Carolyn Commings  
How to Get Your Cat to Do What You Want by Warren Eckstein