



## Cat Behavior Series: Scratching

Scratching is a normal behavior for cats. Cats scratch to exercise muscles and tendons in their lower legs and paws. It also assists in shucking off old nail husks. The primary function of scratching however, is communication. Cats scratch to mark their territory, both the visible marks and the more subtle scents left behind are important signals to other cats about the feline who claims their territory in that area. While this is a healthy and natural for cats in the wild, it is less than welcome when the territory being claimed is your antique sofa.

There are many strategies to help cats learn to channel their scratching instincts into less destructive areas. Providing appropriate scratching areas- cat posts, cardboard scratchers, sisal mats all are acceptable to cats. Keeping cat nails trimmed will lessen accidental damage during training. The judicious use of deterrents can improve training time and consistency and help cats learn the right places to scratch.

Many bad habits can be lessened by providing increased exercise. Providing play sessions with your cat, especially with prey-type toys, provides an outlet for much of the pent-up energy that these predators have. Most cats seem to prefer a few short play sessions over a marathon workout, and a variety of toys will keep your friends interest peaked.

Some cats may mark their territory through scratching is they feel insecure about their place in the home. Providing a stress-free “snug retreat” can help the insecure cat feel safe. Helping spread the scent of the cat by rubbing a cloth on the cat’s cheeks and then rubbing it on scratching areas will also make the cat feel more secure.

### Scratching Posts – The Basics

No matter what type of scratching post you choose for your cat, there are some basic considerations to optimize your cats willingness to use them.

- Keep one more scratching post than you have cats, once your scratching problem is under control, unused posts can be removed.
- Each scratching post should be tall enough for your cat(s) to stretch up on their back feet to their full height without being able to reach over the top, which is about 3 feet high.
- The scratching post should be steady. No self-respecting cat will entertain the thought of using a post that rocks or falls over.
- Use the correct material. One of the essential functions of scratching is to leave a visible mark. Fabric that doesn’t tear or fray will be of no use. Burlap is a favorite with many cats. Sisal rope, carpet& cardboard are also good surfaces.

Choose an attractive location for your cat. Most people try to hide scratching posts from view. This completely negates the whole purpose of scratching for the cat. Position posts in obvious areas at first, preferably near scratching sites that your cat has selected for himself, then gradually repositioned to less obvious places later.

### **Scratching Deterrents**

Several methods can be used to deter cats from scratching on furniture, but since scratching is a normal and necessary behavior in cats, deterrents should not be used unless appropriate scratching areas/ posts are provided.

- Double stick tape applied to scratched areas
- Heavy plastic sheet covering furniture to change texture.
- Chemical deterrents such as Cat-Away™, or aerosol moth repellent.
- Nail covers such as Soft Paws™ are very useful during training periods

### **Scratching Enticements**

- Coat the scratching post with catnip
- Rub a cloth on your cat's cheek and then onto the scratching post, or use a pheromone product such as Feliway™.

Reward your cat with play sessions and treats when they use the scratching post.

Clipping your cats claws is an routine grooming task that your cat will learn to tolerate if it is done regularly. Use claw scissors or nail clippers, removing the tip of each nail up to the quick. Ask your veterinarian for a demonstration of this quick and painless technique