

Furniture Scratching

Scratching with the front claws is a normal, instinctive behavior for cats. The purpose of this activity is thought to be threefold – scratching is a way of marking territory, conditioning the claws by removing worn nail fragments, and some cats are suspected of scratching in order to display excitement when interacting with their owner. Your cats natural scratching behavior becomes a problem when it occurs in an inappropriate location in your home, resulting in a costly, destructive and intolerable habit for your housecat.

Regardless of what measures you take, you will never prevent your cat from scratching so you must control WHERE your cat exhibits this instinctive behavior. Redirecting your cats scratching habits to an acceptable object such as a scratching post takes a little human ingenuity and a lot of patience, but once you have the task completed, you can enjoy your cats company and your furniture for years to come!

Fortunately, furniture scratching is a well-documented problem and veterinarians who specialize in animal behavior have outlined several approaches to prevent the development of this behavior and to correct furniture scratching if it is already a problem with your cat. To prevent and correct inappropriate scratching by your cat you must approach the problem from two angles. First, you must discourage scratching when it occurs in undesirable locations in your home and second, you must provide a suitable alternate location for your cat to carry out its natural scratching behavior. Discouraging undesirable scratching can be accomplished by one or a combination of the following suggestions:

New Kittens

Place a scratching post in the kittens sleeping and playing area and encourage your kitten to “play” on the scratching post by leaving a favorite toy on top of the post. If your kitten is at least 8 weeks of age, you can try placing a small amount of catnip on the scratching post every once and a while. Your kitten should not be left unsupervised in the living room or other areas of your home with carpet and furniture until the kitten develops a scratching routine using the scratching post.

If You Have An Older Cat With A Well Established Scratching Problem

Remove the object being scratched from the room and place a scratching post in the same position.

Cover the object being scratched with plastic, foil, clear packing tape, double sided tape or any other surface which your cat shows an aversion to. Place the scratching post beside the object to encourage its use.

Use a water gun or spray bottle to spray your cat from a distance whenever you catch your pet scratching an undesired object. It is very important that you are several meters away from your cat, otherwise your cat will associate you with the water and avoid you, not the object.

Use a product which smells bad to your cat. Develop a smell aversion by spraying the product directly in front of your cats nose (do not spray on the cat). When your cat leaves the room, spray the product onto your furniture and onto any other scratching problem areas.

When your cat is left unsupervised, be sure it is in a room where scratching is not a problem. Place a scratching post with your cat.

Trim your cats nails weekly to reduce the damage that occurs when they do scratch. Trimming nails does not reduce a cats desire to scratch and should always be used in combination with other techniques. Trimming your cats nails will not reduce its ability to defend itself or to climb, and they are soon re sharpened by scratching behavior.

Ask your veterinarian about a product called Soft Paws (www.softpaws.com) which are a plastic sheath that covers the nails to protect your furniture.

Providing a Suitable Scratching Post

Providing a suitable alternative for scratching is a very important component in preventing and correcting scratching behavior. Your cats scratching post can be a commercial scratching post of station, or a simple home construction. A plain or carpet covered 4'x4', a log, a cardboard creation or any acceptable surface that your cat has shown a preference for can be used. A favorite toy placed or suspended from the scratching post and/or a little catnip may be all your cat needs to entice it to use the scratching post.