

CATS AND INAPPROPRIATE SCRATCHING

WHY SCRATCH?

For a cat, scratching is a very appropriate behavior. In fact, it is quite necessary. Scratching serves a few important purposes:

- It keeps a cat's nails trim and prevents their overgrowth by sloughing off the dead outer layer.
- It signals a cat's presence to others with visual and scent evidence that they were there.
- It exercises and relaxes a cat—much like stretching exercises relax people.
- It deters perceived dangerous predators.

We should not deny a cat his need to scratch, but most guardians prefer that cats not exercise their need to scratch on drapes, sofas, or carpets!

TRIM YOUR CAT'S NAILS

The first thing you can do to minimize destruction of your belongings is to trim your cat's nails. If you leave this task up to your cat alone, he or she is likely to scratch items in your home with greater frequency. An untrimmed claw can easily snag on carpet as your cat walks. When your cat makes an effort to un-snag his claw, he may quickly discover that this particular area of carpet would make a nice area to scratch. Practice—with the help of a vet, groomer or friend—trimming the nails of a cat who is accustomed to and comfortable with having his nails trimmed. When you feel ready to trim your own cat's nails, help your cat get more comfortable with the concept. Start by gently massaging his paws each day. Gradually increase the pressure until your cat is comfortable with the pressure required to help him expose his claws. Take your time but set a goal of being able to trim one nail per day.

CHANNEL THE SCRATCHING ENERGY

Establish areas where your cat will be encouraged to scratch. There are many products on the market designed to accommodate a cat's need to scratch. You can even make a scratching post yourself. Your cat's scratching behavior will tell you whether he prefers a vertical or horizontal scratching area. Some cats like both. Usually cats prefer to scratch in a social area, rather than far away from everyone. In fact, many cats like to scratch in the same areas they like to play and after they wake from a nap. Entice your cat to make use of the new scratching area by sprinkling it with catnip, attaching "scented" cotton balls (tuna oil, catnip spray or even his own scent) to it or by simply playing with your cat around the post.

DETERRENTS

There are several products on the market designed to limit scratching in undesirable areas. The best solution will be one that makes the object unappealing and does not require your presence to be effective. These products include deterrent sprays, scratch deterrent tape and claw caps.

Yelling at your cat, swatting at him or squirting him with a spray bottle only makes you—rather than the scratching—unappealing to your cat. Punishment might interrupt inappropriate scratching momentarily, but it will not teach your cat where to scratch or prevent the behavior from reoccurring when you are not present.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ddfl.org/resource/destructive-scratching-in-cats
- aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/common-cat-behavior-issues/destructive-scratching
- sfpca.org/resource/scratching-posts