

cats scratching furniture

basic feline care

Your cat has shredded your couch, and you don't dare to get a new one because you're afraid it will happen again. 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 their own territory. Cats have scent glands in their feet and deposit this scent while scratching. You can't smell their scent, but other cats can. Your pet may choose your favorite chair (that has your scent on it) to scratch, marking your territory as his. Visual evidence of scratching alerts other cats that this cat has marked their territory. Scratching also removes old claw husks and helps cats keep fit by exercising their leg muscles.

Provide scratching posts:

Cats and dogs learn in different ways, so use techniques appropriate for cats to help ensure your training success. Provide attractive scratching posts (or other type of cat furniture) and teach your cat how 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 yours more than others. Try a variety of cat furniture, such as sisal rope, corrugated cardboard, braided cloth, cotton rope and strong carpet (the backing may be better than the front). If you choose



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

carpet, avoid berber or deep looped styles because your cat's claws can get caught and cause injury. This will also make it harder for your cat to figure out which carpet can be scratched and which is off-limits.

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

Equipment needed:

- Scratching posts and cat furniture covered with assorted textures
- Pet stain & odor remover
- Nail clippers and styptic powder
- Catnip
- Pet repellent sprays
- Cat toys
- Double-faced adhesive strips

Problem solving:

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

Use stain & odor removers to get rid of scent marks. Then try to remove visible scratches: 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 on the corners of the couch makes scratching extremely unpleasant for your pet.

If you are home when your cat starts scratching an area that is off-limits, take your cat to a scratching post as a distraction. Do not try to force your cat—cats do not have an inborn desire to please you, so you need to make them think it's their idea. Be sure to use a happy tone of voice and reward scratching at the approved scratching location.

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

Prevention:

Clip your cat's nails to remove the "hook" at the end and make scratching less rewarding. Your veterinarian or groomer can show you how. Always use sharp clippers made specifically for pets and clip the ends carefully. Don't cut back so far you cut the quick, which will hurt your pet. Cats can learn to accept nail clipping. Go slow and start with just one nail per night, giving lots of rewards and affection. Squeeze the toe to extend the nail before cutting, and make sure you have styptic powder on hand in case you accidentally hit the quick.

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

Declawing is a last resort. This painful 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 your pet may avoid the litter box at first because of painful paws. Declawed cats should never go outside again, and if they happen to escape out the door, they may not be able to defend themselves or escape easily up a tree.

