



BEHAVIOR & TRAINING



PREVENT INAPPROPRIATE SCRATCHING

For cats, scratching serves many purposes and is an innate behavior, one that is natural and needs an appropriate outlet.

Scratching helps to remove frayed, worn out claws so that new healthy ones can grow. Cats also scratch to mark their territory, when stretching, and even when they are happy to see you!

While scratching is an important part of being a cat, it can also cause expensive damage to household items and injury to you. Here are some helpful tips to help promote appropriate scratching, and to decrease the destructive and painful kind.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT SCRATCHING:

The important thing to remember is that scratching is a natural behavior for a cat, and this behavior needs proper outlets. Don't try to stop your cat from scratching! Instead, offer a variety of places and textures to scratch! Below are some cat-scratching dos and don'ts...

SCRATCH HERE!: Try scratching posts made from carpet, cardboard, sisal, wood, or upholstery. Every cat has its preference; try different kinds to see which ones (or two) your cat prefers. **TIP:** Make sure the post is strong, secure and tall; most cats will lean into scratching with their full weight and height. If the post tips over and scares your cat, he/she probably won't feel safe enough to try it again for some time.

ENTICE YOUR FELINE FRIEND: Help your cat become interested in the new post by scenting it with catnip, or placing some of his/her favorite toys near the base, or hanging from the top. You can also use a wand-type toy to draw your cat over to the scratching post.

LOCATION MATTERS: Put the post in a place where your cat has frequently scratched before (the couch, curtains, table, etc.) This will make the transition more fluid and natural for your cat.

NOT HERE: Discourage scratching on the previous inappropriate item by covering it, adding double-sided sticky tape, sand paper, or upside down vinyl carpet runners near the object. Place appropriate scratching item near this same place to give your cat a different and better option.

CLIP CLIP!: Clip your cat's nails regularly. Just like humans, cat's nails can be trimmed very easily and without any pain to the cat. You can have your veterinarian do this, or you can try it yourself. Be careful, it can be a stressful process for all involved, but will help decrease unwanted damage or injury.

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WHAT NOT TO DO ABOUT SCRATCHING:

INTRODUCE YOUR CAT NICELY: Do not physically place your cat in front of the new post and force his/her nails down the object. This will not teach your cat to use the post, but could instead be very scary and cause him/her to avoid the new post. Though you mean well, it is likely your cat will not understand your human motives.

I LOVE MY POST: Do not throw away old, shredded posts because they've become unsightly. Cats prefer to use shredded scratching posts! This may not seem logical to humans, but for cats old posts are really something they can sink their claws into, and it makes their scratching feel more productive. Cats can also become very attached to these used objects; don't underestimate how the familiar feel and smell can be comforting to them.

DO NOT DECLAW:

Declawing is a surgical procedure in which a veterinarian amputates the ends of a cat's toes. It is misnamed because it does not involve only removing the claw.

This is a very painful process for a cat, and one that leaves it defenseless and without an outlet to relieve an important innate behavior. If a cat is not able to use scratching as an outlet, he or she may redirect into negative behaviors including biting!

Keeping your cat's nails clipped regularly will help improve destructive or harmful scratching, and cause no pain for your cat. We highly discourage declawing as a way to prevent or resolve inappropriate scratching. If you need more assistance with this issue, please contact our behavior and training department at training@eastbayspca.org