



DESTRUCTIVE CAT SCRATCHING

Teach your cat what they *can* scratch and what's off-limits

Scratching is a normal, instinctive cat behavior. Cats have a need to scratch. They do it to express emotions, like excitement or stress, to mark objects with their scent (they have scent glands in their paws), to remove the dead part of their nails and, often, just to get a good stretch.

As cat owners, the goal is to provide your cat with options that both cat and owner prefer. Here's how to do that:

Provide your cat with something to scratch that, from their point of view, is more desirable than your couch or the legs of your dining room table.

Cats prefer to scratch tall, sturdy objects that allow them to dig their nails in and get a good grip. That's why cats tend to scratch furniture. Most cats prefer (even more than furniture!) a scratching post that is at least 32" tall, will not wobble when scratched, and made of a type of rope called sisal. Some cats prefer to scratch horizontally, in which case you can either place the vertical scratching post on its side or find a sturdy sisal-covered horizontal scratcher. Some cats like scratching corrugated cardboard as well. Another ideal scratching surface is wood, so if you are handy you can create your own scratching post or pad. Just make sure it's tall or long enough and sturdy.

Place the scratching post in a location where the cat wants to scratch.

If your cat enjoys scratching the couch, place the scratching post next to the couch. If your cat enjoys scratching the wall by your front door when you come home, place the scratching post near your front door. Location matters!

Introduce your cat to the scratching post.

You know that you have the best scratching surface for your cat, but your cat doesn't know that yet. The easiest way to introduce your cat to the post is to play with them around the post; for example, using a fishing rod toy or laser light, so that in the midst of play they will interact with the post. You can also rub catnip on the post for the first several days, which will typically lead the cat to investigate it. It is very important that you do not carry your cat to the scratching surface and rub their paws on the surface. This may seem harmless, but this can create a stress response in some cats and lead them to avoid the scratching post or pad.

Temporarily make the objects the cat previously liked to scratch less desirable.

At this point, you've set your cat up for success in scratching the new post or pad. However, they haven't yet realized how much better the new scratching post is than the furniture. While they figure this out, it's best to deter the cat from scratching the object(s) you don't want them to scratch. For furniture, the easiest and most effective solution is to cover it with a tight-fitting sheet. This sheet will not be nearly as desirable to scratch as the sisal-covered post. For smaller surfaces you can utilize double-sided sticky tape or any other item that will make the object's surface sticky, smooth or slick. Your cat will not enjoy trying to dig their claws into any of these surfaces. Once your cat is consistently using the scratching post/pad, you can remove the covering from the previously scratched objects.

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- Gently rub a soft fabric first on your cat's cheeks and then on the object you don't want scratched. This saves your cat the trouble of using their claws to transfer their scent to the object.
- Temporarily cover objects you don't want scratched with tight fitting sheets or double-sided sticky tape.
- Near the objects you don't want scratched, offer sturdy scratching posts and boards made from different materials like carpet, sisal, wood and cardboard. Try both vertical posts and horizontal or angled boards to learn your cat's preference. Use toys and catnip or honeysuckle spray to entice your cat to use the posts and boards.
- Steer clear of cheap vertical posts with a lightweight base. If a post is wobbly or topples over when your cat uses it, they'll never use it again.
- Anytime you see your cat scratching the posts or boards you've set out, reinforce the good behavior with praise or a treat.
- Keep your cat's claws trimmed with cat clippers (not human nail clippers.)
- Ask your veterinarian about soft plastic caps (like Soft Paws®) that can be glued to your cat's nails.



SAY NO TO DECLAW

Why declawing is bad for your cat

Learn the facts about declawing and better solutions for managing scratching

What is declawing?

Declawing is the amputation of the last bone of each toe on a cat's paw. It would be like cutting off your finger at the last knuckle. The standard method of declawing is amputating with a scalpel or guillotine clipper. The wounds are closed with stitches or surgical glue, and the feet are bandaged. Another method is laser surgery, in which a small, intense beam of light cuts through tissue by heating and vaporizing it. Both can cause lasting physical and behavioral problems for your cat. [Declawing](#) significantly increases the odds of back pain, litter box aversion and biting.

Declawing is banned or considered unethical in dozens of countries around the world. In the U.S., New York, Maryland, the District of Columbia and more than a dozen cities have banned declawing. The Humane Society of the United States and [Humane Society Veterinary Medical Alliance](#) oppose declawing and tendonectomies except in rare cases when it's necessary for medical purposes, such as the removal of cancerous nail bed tumors.

[Download Declawing Fact Sheet](#)

What is a tendonectomy?

During a tendonectomy, the tendon that controls the claw in each toe is severed. The cat keeps their claws but can't control them or extend them to scratch. This procedure is associated with a high incidence of abnormally thick claw growth. Therefore, more frequent and challenging nail trims are required to prevent the cat's claws from snagging on people, carpeting, furniture and drapes, or from growing into the cat's paw pads.

Because of complications, a cat who has been tendonectomized may require declawing later. Although tendonectomy is not actually amputation, a 1998 study published in the [Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association](#) found the incidence of bleeding, lameness and infection was similar between tendonectomy and declawing.

Why is declawing bad?

Declawing can cause paw pain, back pain, infection, tissue necrosis (tissue death) and lameness. Removing claws changes the way a cat's feet meet the ground and can cause pain like wearing an uncomfortable pair of shoes. Improperly removed claws can regrow, causing nerve damage and bone spurs.