



DESTRUCTIVE SCRATCHING

Why Do Cats Scratch?

It's normal for cats to scratch objects in their environment for many reasons:

- To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent - they have scent glands on their paws.
- To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- To work off energy or stress.

Because scratching is normal behaviour that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to *redirect* the scratching onto acceptable objects.

Find out what your cat wants

Provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive, and convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching.

The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:

- Where are they located?
 - Are prominent objects close to sleeping areas?
 - Objects near the entrance to a room are often chosen, especially areas commonly used both by humans and cats. Such as the living room, dining area, etc.
- What texture do they have? (Soft/coarse)
- Are they horizontal or vertical surfaces?
- How tall are they?
- If horizontal, what is the length of the surface your cat is using?



Train Your Cat to Scratch Acceptable Objects

1. Substitute similar objects for her to scratch with rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard, or even a dry, bark-covered log. If using logs, ensure they have not been chemically treated.
2. Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that your cat is already using. **Make sure** the objects are stable and won't fall over or move around when she uses them.
3. Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing. Depending on the motivation to use that surface, a sheet or blanket might suffice if the newly offered material is appealing.

Try using

- Double-sided sticky tape in an X formation.
- Aluminum foil
- Sheets of sandpaper.
- A plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up

Alternatively, you may give the objects an aversive odour by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, oil of citronella, or another unpleasant odor. **Be careful** with odours though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant. Ensure any scents used are unpleasant but still cat-safe and will not cause issues if accidentally ingested.

4. You can try using a pet deterrent product called "SSSCAT". It is a motion detector attached to an aerosol can that detects the cat's motion and releases a puff of air to startle the cat. Once this is repeated a few times, your cat will likely keep away from this location.
5. Soft Paws are vinyl nail caps that are glued onto your cat's existing nails. They are easy to apply and well tolerated by most cats. No damage will occur when your cat scratches since the nails are covered and protected. This product prevents the cat from getting a good purchase on the scratching surface, but it does not diminish the need or desire to scratch.
6. When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved **very gradually**, no more than three inches each day, to a location more suitable to



you. It's best to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.

7. Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odours from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

Should I Punish My Cat For Scratching?

NO! Punishment won't change the behaviour. It may cause your cat to become afraid of you or the environment and may elicit defensive aggression or other undesirable behaviour due to an increase in the cat's stress level. Punishment doesn't teach your cat where you would prefer them to scratch only to avoid scratching when you are present.

Tactics like spraying your cat with water or shaking pennies in a can may seem like an effective temporary solution but the cat will continue to scratch a desirable location when you are not around to react. When your cat scratches something, they are telling you that this is the location where they would like to scratch, so giving them an acceptable scratching outlet in that location is the best way to positively train. For example, if your cat is going for the corner of your couch place a scratching post in front of this part of the couch.

Should I Declaw My Cat?

NO! The ABVMA (Alberta Veterinary Medical Association) banned declawing in Alberta in July 2019. This procedure is not provided by veterinarians in Alberta. Scratching is a natural behaviour for cats, and they can be directed to appropriate items. Be patient and consistent with training.

If you find you are struggling to resolve your cat's scratching behaviour, you can always call our behaviour outreach line at 403-723-6019 or book a consultation via our website <https://www.calgaryhumane.ca/what-we-do/animal-training/private-consultations/>