

The Scoop by Kari O'Brien

NOT MY COUCH! Persuading your feline friend to use their scratching post.

Many cat owners ask about solutions to scratching problems. I interviewed Our Companions' Cat Expert Andrea Baranyai for her take on common questions, and her advice on how to live happily with our clawed friends.

Why Do Cats Destroy Furniture?

In order to effectively manage a cat's scratching problem, it's important to understand why cats scratch. Cats need to scratch-- the behavior is hardwired into their brain and is not optional. Cats scratch to release stress, affirm territory, exercise and stretch their muscles. The act of scratching also helps cats groom their nails. A scratching cat is a happy cat!

I've Tried Everything! What's the Secret?

There are several important factors when selecting a scratching post for your cat. A heavy base to prevent tipping and a height of at least 28" are essential. Cats need to be able to utilize their entire body weight to fully stretch their muscles. That's why you commonly see cats using the couch.

Is your scratching post all carpet? Cats love a variety of textures, so be sure to look for a post that contains several materials such as sisal, bare wood, cardboard and carpet. They can be a little pricey, but well worth the investment if it saves your furniture. Get yourself a big, heavy, tall, multi-surfaced scratching post, sprinkle some catnip on and imitate a scratching motion to get them started.

Location, Location, Location

Anyone who knows cats, knows they can be lazy. That said, cats don't want to go upstairs, down in the basement or over two rooms to use a scratching post-- they want to use whatever is closest and in plain view. Place large scratching posts in the rooms and areas where your cat spends the most amount of time. If your cat is already scratching the couch, place the scratching post directly in front of where he/she has scratched. If you can afford several large posts, great! If not, save some money and purchase one large post and a bunch of the small, inexpensive corrugated cardboard type. These are always a favorite! Use them in less favored, but occasional scratching areas of the house.

Bad Kitty!

Okay, so maybe you have an older cat who is a little more stubborn about using appropriate scratching posts. There are several extremely effective options, which can be used in conjunction with scratching posts, to help prevent your couch from being shredded to bits. These include: double sided tape or SofaSavers on the corners of the couches, clipping claws frequently, adding a slipcover, and SoftPaws, vinyl nail covers that fit over your cat's claws.

Declawing is Disfigurement!

Declawing is not simply removing the claw-- it is similar to amputating a fingertip. In some instances, declawing may affect how cats stand, walk, use the litter box, stretch, exercise, emotionally deal with other animals and situations and mostly importantly, is inhumane. Declawing is unnecessary if a proper outlet is provided for cats to scratch. A commitment to keeping your cat's claws will result in a happier, healthier feline companion.

The Last Scratch

Mostly importantly, remember that cats are like humans in the sense that they have bad days, make bad decisions and feel stress. Be sure to show your cat positive reinforcement with praise, petting and treats, when you see them using the appropriate scratching areas. Also, be understanding and expect there will be times your cat will scratch something he/she is not supposed to.

Need help managing your cat's scratching? Contact Andrea@ourcompanions.org.