

HOW TO STOP DESTRUCTIVE SCRATCHING

Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats scratch upright objects for claw maintenance, for territorial marking (both visual and scent/pheromone signals), and for stretching.

Finding Common Ground

This normal behavior of cats becomes a problem when household items are destroyed. Our goal is to help you resolve this problem so that you can continue to have a happy relationship with your cat.

What To Do? The First Step....Observation

First, observe your cat “in action.” Try to notice which materials the cat prefers to scratch. In addition, does he/she sniff the surface before scratching? Understanding the preferred scratching surfaces will help you to select a scratching post/device that the cat will actually use. Understanding if scent is involved will help you to determine if pheromone therapy will play a role in the training.

Step 2: Scratching Post Selection

- 1- Find a scratching post that is acceptable to the cat.
- 2- You may need to offer several different types until a suitable one is found.
- 3- Options are: sisal-rope covered posts, upright fireplace logs, Cosmic Cat Alpine Scratcher (slope cardboard option), or traditional carpet-covered posts.
- 4- Four features to consider in a scratching post design are : Be sure that it is tall enough to allow for full extension of front legs and stretching. Be sure that it is very stable (won't fall/move when the cat tries to scratch it). To avoid confusion, it is probably best if the post is a different texture/material than that of your furniture or other household possessions that you don't want the cat to scratch. Place the selected scratching posts at the cat's favorite locations.

Step 3: The Actual Training

- I. The pet is under constant supervision.
- II. “Interrupt” the pet whenever they scratch on an inappropriate surface in the house. You DON'T want to intervene in a way that will make the cat fearful. Do not use any physical punishment. When you need to “interrupt” the cat, it is best to use a device at a distance to create an unpleasant noise (i.e. Air horn, handheld alarm).
- III. When you cannot directly watch the cat, confine the cat to a room or area

of the house where the only acceptable surface to scratch is its post.

IV. REWARD the cat when he/she approaches the desired scratching post with a small treat, and give a bigger/better treat when the scratching post is actually scratched.

V. During the initial 4-6 weeks of training, you may need to take extra precautions to protect your belongings until the cat is fully trained. Things that you can do during this time are to drape coverings over the furniture that you are trying to protect (use loose coverings, double sided tape, aversive scents), frequent nail trims or “Soft Paw” nail coverings.

VI. If you have decided that scratching is definitely occurring as a marking behavior, a pheromone spray will be helpful during the initial training period as well. **Feliway** pheromone product should be sprayed over the scratched area (i.e. furniture) once per day for 21 days, as well as on similar prominent vertical areas in the home. **Feliway** is also available as an electronic diffuser for more generalized room application.

Step 4: The Final Weeks Of Training

After 4-6 weeks of the basic training, you should be able to remove the protective coverings from your furniture when you are home and you can actually watch the cat. If there are any “relapses,” you can toss a key chain near the cat or squirt it with a water gun if he/she is caught in the act of attempting to scratch the furniture. After a few more weeks of reinforcing the trained behaviors, you should be able to gradually trust the cat unsupervised near your furniture again.

Other Training Tools and Tips

You may want to consider further obedience training of your cat with clicker training. Books on this subject are available at MVH . **Soft Paws** are another potential short-term solution. These are protective nail caps that can be applied once every 6-8 weeks, depending on rate of nail growth. Nurse appointments are available for this service, and for nail trims as well.