

How To Stop Your Cat From Scratching Furniture

One of the most common complaints about cats is that they scratch the furniture with their claws resulting in a shredded mess. Why do they insist on ruining your stuff?



By Kelley Bollen

Well, the first thing you need to understand is that scratching is a normal and important behavior for cats. It's not just a behavior they like to do, it's a behavior they have to do. Every two to three months, the outer sheath of the cat's nail comes off to make room for the newer nail to grow in. Scratching helps cats remove that dead nail sheath. In addition to this necessary function, scratching is also an important marking behavior for cats. Cats are very territorial animals, and scratching is one way that they mark their territory. The visual mark that they leave behind (the shredded substrate) tells everyone that this area is theirs. In addition to the visual marks, cats also leave an olfactory mark on the scratched surface. You see, cats have scent glands in the pads of their feet and, when they scratch on something, they also deposit the substance in those glands onto the surface. Because a cat's sense of smell is their most important sense, leaving behind a scent mark is a powerful message to other cats.

Since scratching is such a normal and important behavior for cats, there is no way to stop them from doing it. The goal is to get them to scratch on a more suitable item like a scratching post so that they stop damaging your furniture. There are many different kinds of scratching posts so it's important to purchase the ones that cats prefer. The first thing to consider is the substrate covering the post. Although many of the scratching posts you find in stores are covered in loop carpeting, cats do not prefer this substrate because their claws get caught in the carpet loops when they scratch. If you purchase a carpeted post, make sure it's covered with low pile berber carpeting. The posts that most cats prefer, however, are the ones covered with sisal rope or those made of natural wood. You can even make your own natural wood post using a tree branch or log from the woodpile.

The second important component is the height of the post. A vertical scratching post needs to be tall and stable. Cats love to stretch their whole body when they scratch so the short posts are not preferred. And if the post is not stable and falls over when the cat scratches on it, they will stop using it. Some cats also enjoy horizontal posts. Many of the horizontal scratching boards are made of corrugated cardboard and are quite inexpensive. My recommendation is to purchase a variety of scratching posts so your cat has a choice.

The last bit of advice is the location of the posts. It is important to place the posts in prominent areas of your house. This is where your cat feels he needs to advertise his presence – not in the back bedroom or the basement. If your cat is scratching on the sofa in your living room, put a scratching post near the sofa. While you may not want a scratching post in your living room, it's way better to have one there than to replace your expensive sofa every few years.

Once you have provided your cat with a variety of scratching posts in prominent areas of your house, you can discourage use of your furniture using a few different strategies. You can put double-sided tape or some aluminum foil strips on the corners of your furniture to discourage use



or you can hang a sachet on the furniture soaked with a scent that cats don't like such as citrus or menthol.

Living peacefully with your cat takes understanding of their kitty ways and providing an environment where they can do cat things without it causing human grief and frustration.

Kelley Bollen, MS, CABC is a Certified Animal Behavior Consultant with a master's degree in Animal Behavior who has worked in the field of companion animal behavior for 20 years. As a shelter behavior specialist, Kelley consults with animal shelters in the design and implementation of comprehensive behavior programs to address the behavioral health of the shelter animals.

