

# ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE of BOSTON



*Helping animals since 1899.*

## **Responding to Destructive Scratching by Your Cat**

### **Why Cats Scratch**

Cats scratch things for several reasons. It is a way for them to stretch their claws and use up some of their energy. They also scratch to mark their territory, using the scent glands located in their paws and leaving a visual mark for other cats to see.

### **Teaching Your Cat to Scratch Appropriately**

Because scratching is a normal cat behavior, teaching a cat not to scratch will not work. Instead, you will need to direct the cat's natural scratching behavior towards an appropriate object, such as a scratching post or a scratching pad.

The first step is to find a good scratching post. When shopping for your scratching post, remember to consider it from your cat's perspective. Make sure what you buy is sturdy, since a cat will not use a post that falls over when they lean against it. It should also be large enough texture that they can dig their nails into (carpet or sisal are good choices). Corrugated cardboard scratching boards are another great option sold at many pet stores.

The next step is to decide where to put the post. Again, you need to think about where your cat would like the scratching post to be located. Cats will not go out of their way to find a scratching post; if one is not readily available to them, they will simply find something else to use. And since they are trying to mark their territory, they will want to scratch somewhere prominent, not in an unused corner of the house. Try placing the scratching post near your cat's favorite sleeping spot, in rooms the cat frequently visits, or in entrances to the rooms in your home. This can encourage cats to stop and scratch as they pass by. You may need to buy several scratching posts to accommodate your cat's scratching needs.

Now that you have given your cat a place to scratch, you will need to entice him or her to it. To do this, you need to make the scratching post seem much better than your furniture. Try to make the post as appealing as possible: attach toys to it, rub it with catnip, and give your cat a favorite treat for approaching it or using it. You will also want to make the surrounding furniture unappealing. You can cover the furniture with unpleasant textures, such as double-sided tape or plastic wrap. You can also use a quick loud noise (a single clap or shaking a can of coins, not a tirade) or a squirt bottle *if you catch your cat in the act*. Finding scratched furniture and shouting

at or physically punishing your cat will not solve the problem; it will only damage the trusting relationship you are trying to build with your cat.

If your cat already has a favorite scratching spot and you are trying to introduce him or her to a post, use a good deodorizing agent to get the cat's scent out of the furniture, then place the scratching post directly in front of it. Use toys, treats, and catnip to attract the cat to the post, then move it to its permanent location. This must be done slowly, no more than a few inches a day, or your cat may return to his or her previous scratching spot.

### **Trimming Your Cat's Nails**

Nail trimming is an effective way to minimize the damage your cat does to your furniture and keep him or her from accidentally scratching you. If you have never trimmed a cat's nails before, you can ask your veterinarian to show you how. Make sure you have styptic powder handy in case you accidentally make the nail bleed. Some cats do not like having their feet touched. Do not risk your safety or that of your cat to trim their nails at home; have a veterinarian or groomer trim them for you.

### **Declawing and Soft Paws**

Historically, declawing has been used as a method to prevent the damage done by a cat's scratching. The Animal Rescue League of Boston considers declawing a cat to be an inhumane practice.

Declawing a cat involves either surgery to remove the digit at the last knuckle (onychectomy), the severing of the attendant tendons (tenectomy), or the use of a laser to burn off the last portion of the digit. In all cases, there is pain (sometimes lifelong), recovery time, and risk associated with the declawing procedure. Many owners also notice negative changes in their cats' behavior.

If you have tried to get your cat to use the scratching post and are having no luck at all, Soft Paws are a humane alternative to declawing. Soft Paws are vinyl nail caps that will prevent your cat from damaging your furniture when scratching. They are not permanent, but they are fairly inexpensive and easy to apply, and they will not cause your cat any pain. Boston Veterinary Care at the Animal Rescue League of Boston offers Soft Paws applications. Please call the BVC at (617) 226-5605 for more information.

Sources:

[www.catscratching.com](http://www.catscratching.com)

[www.hsus.org](http://www.hsus.org)

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The Animal Rescue League of Boston is dedicated to rescuing domesticated animals and wildlife from suffering, cruelty, abandonment and neglect. We do not receive government funding. We rely solely on the generosity of our supporters to help animals in need. Help us help more animals today at [arlboston.org](http://arlboston.org)!

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