

Destructive Scratching

Cats are biologically motivated to scratch (even declawed cats do it!). Cats scratch for many reasons. It helps them to maintain the quality of their nails, burn extra energy, cope with stress, stretch, and communicate a message (both visually and through the pheromones they deposit). However, it can be infuriating to cat caregivers who have to deal with shredded curtains and damaged furniture.

Provide appropriate scratching options

The fact is: cats are going to scratch. So, it is important for caregivers to provide an appropriate opportunity for their cats to engage in this behaviour. There are several factors to consider when choosing a scratcher:

- **Material** – Scratchers come in many materials (e.g., sisal rope, corrugated cardboard, carpet, and other fabrics).
- **Direction** – Scratchers can be oriented horizontally, vertically, or on an angle.
- **Size** – Scratchers should be tall/long enough for the cat to stretch while scratching.



A recent study¹ found that cats prefer scratchers made of sisal rope and corrugated cardboard to other materials, and horizontal orientation to vertical. However, individual preferences vary, and it may be wise to provide a variety of types of scratchers in your home, and see which your cat prefers!

Encourage use of desired scratching options

Once you have appropriate scratching options, there are several strategies you can employ to help ensure that your cat uses them.

- **Location** – Since cats communicate a message by scratching, it is important to position scratchers in a high traffic area, and not tucked away in a corner.
- **Number** – Providing multiple scratchers distributed around the house will ensure that there is an appropriate option near by when your cat feels the itch to scratch.
- **Catnip and silver vine** – Sprinkling a little catnip (or its lesser known cousin silver vine) on a scratcher has been shown to increase the likelihood cats will use them¹.
- **Feliscratch** – This product is a synthetic version of the pheromone that cats produce between the digits of their paws. Some studies have shown that applying it to a scratcher can increase the likelihood cats will use it², but not all studies found this to be true¹.
- **Positive reinforcement** – whenever you see your cat using the scratcher, reward this behaviour with treat, praise, or petting.



Make current target less appealing

Once you have done everything you can to make the appropriate scratching option as appealing as you can, it is time to make the old targets unappealing as possible.

- **Clean** – Remove any scents that may be attracting them, by cleaning the surface with an enzymatic spray.
- **Scent** – Spray the surface with a scent that will repel the cat (but is not offensive to humans). Try water mixed with lemon, cayenne pepper, or peppermint.
- **Discomfort** – Find a mat that has nubs on the bottom (designed to keep the mat in place) and place upside down right in front of the surface. This will make it uncomfortable for the cat to stand there, and therefore less likely to scratch it.
- **Block** – Make it difficult for the cat to access the surface by covering it with clear tape. Using double sided carpet tape will have the added bonus of the unpleasant sticky feeling when they touch it.
- **Do not punish** – Punishing your cat for scratching may scare your cat and damage your bond. Instead, focus on rewarding their good behaviours.



Keep cat's claws trimmed

Clipping your cat's claws is key to avoiding ingrown claws, reducing damage to your furniture, and decreasing your risk of accidental injury during interaction. See [Trimming Your Cat's Claws](#) for more information!

Soft Paws

In most cases, the steps above should be enough to reduce or eliminate destructive scratching. But in more severe cases, Soft Paws can be a great solution to the problem. Soft Paws are temporary and humane vinyl caps that go over your cat's claws. They usually need to be reapplied every 2 weeks. This can be done in your home if you cat is tolerant of the application. For more resistant cats this can be done by the veterinarian.

Do not declaw

Do not declaw your cat. Declawing is the amputation of the last bone on each of a cat's toes. This can lead to chronic pain and increased behavioural issues such as biting, out-of-box elimination, and over-grooming³. Declawing is illegal in many countries around the world, because it is regarded as inhumane.

Resources:

¹Zhang, L., & McGlone, J. J. (2020). Scratcher preferences of adult in-home cats and effects of olfactory supplements on cat scratching. *Applied Animal Behaviour Science*, 104997.

²Cozzi, A., Lecuelle, C. L., Monneret, P., Articiaux, F., Bougrat, L., Mengoli, M., & Pageat, P. (2013). Induction of scratching behaviour in cats: efficacy of synthetic feline interdigital semiochemical. *Journal of feline medicine and surgery*, 15(10), 872-878.

³Martell-Moran, N. K., Solano, M., & Townsend, H. G. (2018). Pain and adverse behavior in declawed cats. *Journal of feline medicine and surgery*, 20(4), 280-288.

