

## **SCRATCHING - DOING WHAT COMES NATURALLY**

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Just as a dog has to wag his tail, cats must scratch. It serves many purposes for your cat. Kitty may be expressing happiness or frustration, using it as a marking behavior, or for stretching its body, and for getting rid of dead nail sheaths. Be assured, the one reason your cat WILL NEVER do this is to be naughty, destructive, or spiteful.

Providing appropriate things for your cat to scratch upon is essential! Determine what kind of scratcher your cat is – vertical, horizontal or both - in order to get the most appealing thing for him to scratch. The correct material on a post and its height are the most important things to consider. Most scratching posts and cat trees are made of plush carpet. These are often rejected in favor of the back of a couch.

Why is that? It's the consistency of the materials. Cats usually prefer something rough and tightly woven to dig their claws into, such as rope or something akin to indoor-outdoor carpet, that provides resistance. A sturdy post at least 30" high with a wide base is preferable so his whole body may stretch while clawing. Many scratching posts are covered in sisal or have a log of exposed wood that will be appealing to your cat. If you want to make a scratching post with carpet scraps, try putting the carpet on BACKWARDS. Your cat will likely prefer this rough texture to the plush side. Even if your cat will use the carpeted side, it is not very durable and shreds in short order. Be open to the possibility that you may need more than one post or scratching box in your house placed in the common areas where your cat hangs out.

For the horizontal scratcher, rectangular scratching boxes filled with corrugated cardboard work well. These usually come with catnip to attract the cat. You may want several to place strategically throughout your house.

If your cat is scratching inappropriately, your first line of defense is to cut the nails often. There are special nail scissors for cats sold at pet stores. Kittens need their nails cut about every two weeks and adults once a month. Then, you need to make what he is scratching as unappealing as possible. Put Sticky Paws, a double-sided tape, or just plain packing tape where he is scratching. If he's scratching a stair or

some part of your carpet you don't want him to use, put a book or scratching box on that spot temporarily until he's trained to the appropriate place. Put the scratching post up against furniture or woodwork he's been using so he has another choice. Rubbing catnip all over the post may also attract many cats. However, about 25% of cats do not react to catnip, so don't get discouraged if your cat is one of these.

Training a cat to use the scratching post takes patience, repetition, and perseverance. It does NO good to yell at your cat when he's scratching your couch. He just doesn't understand because what he's doing makes perfect sense to him. Instead, use distraction with a feather toy running it all around the scratching post for him to chase. When he's scratching the furniture, carry him to the post and show him with your hands how to scratch it. Never take his paws to make this motion. He won't like it and will probably run away and may have a negative association with the post thereafter.

Kittens might take longer to train. Making a game of the post over time will train him to use it. You might have better luck at first by putting the post on its side while running the feather toy all over it until it clicks in his mind that this is a great thing to claw. Using a squirt bottle to ward off kitty is a less desirable, less kind way of training. Most cat behaviorists recommend *redirection* instead. If you're not around all the time to reinforce appropriate scratching with your cat, make sure he's confined to a room with nothing to scratch but a post when you're away. Then, when you're home, you can begin the "scratching lessons" in the rest of your house.

Don't give in and let the cat scratch a chair just because it's old. When you get a new chair, guess what? He won't know not to use it! Whatever you do, don't give up! You, your cat and his claws CAN live happily together.