

Cat Scratching Posts & Claw Trimming

Cats scratch surfaces as a way of marking territory and to remove old claw sheaths. It is a natural part of cat behavior, and must be accepted as such. Declawing is a cruel and unnecessary surgery, banned in the UK and other countries because it is inhumane. The adoption contract you signed specified that the cat you adopted must never be declawed. Although many vets still provide this surgery, it is becoming more and more unpopular in the USA as pet owners become educated about the procedure, which involves the amputation of the last bone, to which the claw is attached, and tendons in each digit of the paw.

In order to avoid the destruction of furniture or carpets, immediately provide your cat with her own scratching surface. You may need to try several types to find out which one she prefers. Some variants are; sisal rope, wood, carpet, and cardboard. Catnip can be used to attract cats to the scratching post. If you provide a few choices your cat will be less likely to go for the furniture. Most cats prefer a tall, vertical surface to stretch up against and scratch, but some prefer a horizontal surface,.

We highly recommend the Purrfect Post (www.purrfectpost.com), it is a tall post covered with woven sisal and provides both vertical and horizontal surfaces. You can construct a simple “cat tree” by screwing a 3’ post to a 2’ by 2’ square heavy plywood base. The post can be left bare or covered with carpet or wrapped with woven sisal. Sisal remnants can be purchased from rug makers. If you make your own post with carpet, be sure to melt the edges of the carpet to prevent unraveling, swallowing long strings from unraveled carpet has sent more than one cat to hospital for expensive surgery. Check out the resources section of our website for links to plans for building cat trees.

If your cat still goes for the furniture, place double-sided carpet tape (sold in pet stores as Sticky Paws, which is clear and removes easily from the surface) in the place she scratches. Cats don’t like the sticky sensation. Place a suitable post right beside the place she scratches and praise her when she uses it. Never chase her or yell at her when she scratches furniture, she’ll just associate the punishment with you and see it as a territory challenge, and may end up scratching more! Cat repellent sprays hardly ever work, but Feliway (www.feliway.com) has some success in stopping territorial scratching.

Soft Paws

For determined destructive scratchers, try Soft Paws (www.softpaws.com) – they are plastic covers that are glued to the claw using an adhesive similar to the one used for false nails that humans wear. They are available in many pet food stores, or at their website. Your vet or a groomer can usually apply them if you are unable to do it.

Trimming Claws

Keeping your cat's claws trimmed will reduce the damage done if she does scratch things. It's easy and need only be done once a month. If you've adopted a kitten, get them used to having their paws handled while they are small.

What you need: Fingernail trimmers for humans are safe and easy to use on cat claws, just get a good sharp pair, not the old ones worn down by use on your toenails!

1. Start by holding your cat with her back end against you and front facing away, and gently examine each paw. Immediately reward with praise and/or a treat and release the cat. This ensures that she knows she will only be restrained for a short time and used to the feeling of having her paws handled, which most cats don't like.
2. Repeat this handling a few times before attempting to trim the claws. Gradually progress to extending the claw without trimming. To extend the claw, hold the paw in your hand and gently press with your thumb on the top of the toe while supporting the paw pad with a finger underneath.
3. You may want to have an assistant for the actual trimming. Start out holding the cat as you did in step #1, gently extend one claw and quickly trim just the sharp tip. Be very careful not to trim too much, cutting the quick will cause a lot of bleeding and pain and will probably make your cat fear trimming forever.
4. After trimming one claw, reward and release the cat immediately. You can do another claw a few minutes or hours later, or even the next day. This way the procedure will be over before your cat starts to get really upset about the restraint, and the positive experience will help build a foundation of trust.
5. Once your cat is more used to trimming, you can try to trim a whole paw at once. Always reward and release your cat before real trouble starts – try to be aware of the signs that the cat is getting more upset.

