



Resolving Unwanted Scratching

Scratching is a very important part of being a cat. Cats scratch for many reasons including: to remove the dead outer layer of the claw, to mark their territory, to stretch, and to work off energy. This normal and necessary behavior can become a problem for pet parents when a cat chooses your favorite piece of furniture to scratch. The good news is that there are a variety of things you can do to teach your cat the appropriate location to scratch.

Training your cat to scratch acceptable objects

- **Provide a scratching post** – Whether it is a 6 foot tall cat tree or a cardboard scratcher on the floor, it is essential that you provide your cat with an appropriate place to scratch. Your cat needs to practice this behavior and if she doesn't have a scratching post she will choose something else.
- **Choosing the right scratching post** – Cats can have preferences about the material (sisal, carpet, wood), height and location of their scratching post. To encourage your cat to investigate her new scratching post you can sprinkle it with catnip or spray it with catnip spray. As a general rule your scratching post should be long enough or tall enough to allow your cat to stretch out completely.
- **Location, location, location** – The scratching post should be in a part of your house where your cat already likes to spend her time. Be sure that it is easily accessible to your cat from all sides so that she can stand on the floor and stretch out to scratch.

Discouraging scratching of unacceptable objects

- **The old switcheroo** – If your cat has already started to scratch on an unacceptable object, place a scratching post or board right next to where she is already scratching. Make the scratching board/post appealing with catnip and treats. Your cat has already chosen that location in the house to scratch so providing an acceptable object in that location will help her to quickly learn to scratch the post instead of that piece of furniture.
- **Use deterrents** – Sometimes simply providing an acceptable object isn't enough to get a cat to stop scratching where she has previously. Remember, part of the reason for scratching is to mark territory and animals often remark the same spot over and over. You can use a variety of texture deterrents to make a formerly scratched location unappealing. Examples of textural deterrents include aluminum foil, duct tape, and double-sided tape. These are usually only needed for a short time until your cat starts to scratch on the appropriate surface. There are also sprays formulated to deter scratching, however, changing the texture of the previously scratched surface tends to be the most effective deterrent.
- **Training** – Many cat parents choose to train their cat not to scratch unacceptable objects using a squirt bottle or loud noise to interrupt the behavior. While this does startle your cat and interrupt the scratching it is not a perfect solution because it only teaches your cat not to scratch in your presence or in the presence of the squirt bottle. Instead, focus on teaching your cat the right thing

to do by rewarding her for scratching on her post with treats, catnip or a play session. Scratching is a self-rewarding behavior so setting your cat up to succeed by providing a scratching post and using deterrents to discourage scratching inappropriate objects is half the battle.

Concerns about declawing

- Declawing is a procedure where a veterinarian amputates the end digit and claw of a cat's paw. It is an elective surgery and considered inhumane by many. Declawing can have unwanted side effects including chronic pain, misuse of the litter box and an increase in biting.
- Options to declawing include keeping cats claws trimmed or the use of products such as Soft Paws. Soft Paws are plastic caps that go over the cats claws. These humane alternatives allow the cat to keep her claws but protect your furniture or young children.
- If you must have a declawed cat due to a rental agreement or other reason please consider adopting a cat that is already declawed.

How to trim a cat's claws

- Purchase a nail trimmer specifically designed for cats.
- Teach your cat to accept having her paws handled by giving her treats while playing with her paws. Press on the pads to extend her claws and feed her treats at the same time so she is not sensitive to this handling.
- Have an assistant hold your cat while you press the pad of a paw to extend her claws. Identify the quick of the nail (the pink part at the base that houses the blood vessels) and trim the white tip of the claw above the quick. If you cut the quick it will be painful to your cat and she will bleed.
- Be patient and take your time, it may take several sessions to trim all of your cat's claws if she is too squirmy or uncomfortable with this handling. Try to distract her with treats or petting and trim her claws when she is relaxed as opposed to in a playful mood. If your cat is particularly difficult to handle consult your veterinarian for tips.

We Can Help! The Training and Behavior Department at the Humane Society of Western Montana has a variety of resources available to help you and your pets live in harmony! The Humane Society has several dog trainers and a behaviorist on staff to provide affordable group and private training lessons and free behavior consultations.

- Contact Jean, our Behaviorist for a free pet behavior consultation by emailing behavior@myhswm.org or calling the Behavior Helpline at (406) 549-9295.
- Contact Mariah, a Certified Professional Dog Trainer, to inquire about private lessons or a group training class. Email outreach@myhswm.org or call (406) 549-HSWM.
- Check out our website at www.myhswm.org for a complete listing of dog classes, rates and additional information.