

DON'T De-CLAW! Scratch That, Not This

Cats have an inherent need to scratch, usually to mark their territory. There are 3 functions to their need to scratch; 1) Removal of the dead part of their claws 2) There are glands in their paws that are making the scratching post and their need to stretch-make sure to have vertical scratching posts that are taller than the cat when FULL grown. Knowing this is natural, it's best to provide your cat with scratching toys from the day you bring her home. This can help deter her from claiming your favorite belongings. But no matter what, if your cat thinks your furniture is hers, here are some tips to reclaim your couch.

TEACH WHAT TO SCRATCH

While you can't stop your cat's natural urge to scratch, you can teach her what to scratch. Offer her a variety of scratching toys, both flat pads and vertical posts, including a variety of textures (carpet, corrugated cardboard, etc.). Place them next to the furniture she likes to scratch or where she likes to play. Encourage use by attracting her with treats and play. When you see her using it, give her praise and more treats. If she attempts to scratch an unwanted object, pick her up and place her on the object you DO want her to use. Do not yell, hit or spray her with water....it is part of your training process to teach her the right place to do what she needs to do.

TEACH WHAT NOT TO SCRATCH

If you catch your cat scratching your furniture or another forbidden item, distract her and bring her to the scratching pad (or bring the scratching pad to her). Never punish your cat, because it could make her confused and fearful, and it could hinder your training.

It's also a good idea to cover or remove items that your cat likes to scratch until she gets the idea. By temporarily taking away all her other scratching outlets, she will be forced to scratch at the posts. Another option is to place plastic wrap or double-sided tape on the floor or furniture where your cat stands to scratch, because cats hate the feeling of these materials on their paws.

MINIMIZE THE DAMAGE

Sometimes cats scratch to help relieve excess energy. Be sure to play with your cat daily, and offer her a variety of toys to play with independently.

Another way to minimize damage is to keep her claws trimmed. Some cats trim their own claws by biting them or filing them down on their scratching post. Other cats need help from their owners. The key to struggle-free trimming is to handle your cat's paws early and often to get her comfortable with it. While your cat is resting, gently press on the pad of her foot to extend the claws. Ask a friend or family member to help you by feeding her treats as you trim her claws. This will not only distract her, but it'll help her associate trimming with something positive. If all else fails, you may need to take her to a veterinarian or professional groomer.

Just because you have a cat doesn't mean you can't have nice things. With patience and training, you can save your sofa and your sanity.