

# LIVING WITH A CLAWED CAT

## Information for Cat Caregivers



Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. There are ways you can live alongside your cat in harmony by understanding these natural behaviors and practice good techniques that will enrich your home.

### Why Do Cats Have Claws?

Your cats' claws are unique and serve several functions. The forelimb claws of cats are uniquely retractable and allow them to expose or retract their nails as needed.

Main uses for cats' claws:

- A cat may expose their claws to hunt and use them to grasp and capture their prey.
- Mark territory both visually (scratching inanimate objects) and chemically (via pheromones).
- To defend itself during conflict with other cats or animals.

### Why Do Cats Scratch Inanimate Objects?

Scratching is a natural, normal, and necessary behavior for your cat. Your cat does not scratch to upset you or intentionally damage your furniture. Scratching is a form of communication that your cat expresses during times of stress and anxiety.

Cats scratch for three main reasons:

- To renew the nail by dislodging the old nail growth and exposing a new, sharper nail underneath.
- To mark their territory visually and with scent (pheromones) to other cats and animals.
- To stretch out their limbs.

Your cat may experience increased scratching and marking in times of stress and anxiety, including when environmental resources are threatened or restricted. Discuss your cat's daily routine with your veterinarian so they can address the issue and offer advice to resolve the problem.



### Best Practices for Living with a Clawed Cat

Here are some preventive strategies for living with your clawed cat.

Tips for living with a cat with nails:

- Trim cat's nails regularly (Request training from your veterinarian).
- Provide appropriate resources for your cat:
  - Litter boxes
  - Sleeping and resting areas
  - Food bowls
  - Water bowls
  - Scratching surfaces
  - Toys for play
- Provide appropriate environmental enrichment in your home to include interactive play, perches and scratch posts, and human attention if desired.
- Address any inter-cat related issues that may be causing fear or anxiety.

Inter-cat conflict is common and a cause of undesirable scratching. The signs are subtle so consult with your veterinarian to help recognize these behavioral problems. Ensure all resources are ample and located in multiple locations throughout your house to prevent competition for these resources if there are multiple cats at home.

- Teach everyone your household that cats should be treated with respect. No one should be allowed to play rough with a cat or handle them in a manner that causes fear, stress, or pain.
- Do not use your fingers or toes, or the wiggling of hands or feet as a toy for play. This form of play can lead to biting or scratching. Instead, play can be stimulated with the use of interactive toys that mimic prey, such as a toy mouse that is pulled across a floor or feathers on a wand that is waved through the air.



# Living with a Clawed Cat continued

## What Makes an Ideal Scratching Surface?



Each cat prefers different scratching surfaces. To determine which your cat prefers, offer an assortment of scratching options, in a wide variety of locations around your home.

Here are some important scratching post features to keep in mind:

- Size and Shape - Most cats like to scratch vertically. They will need a sturdy post that is taller than their body length to fully

stretch and give a good scratch.

If the cat is scratching carpet, a horizontal scratcher may be a good alternative.

- Texture - The texture of the scratching post is also important. Many cats prefer sisal rope; others prefer corrugated cardboard, carpet, or wood on the scratching surface.
- It is important to experiment with a variety of textures and types of scratchers to determine which is preferred by each cat.

## Train Cats to Scratch Appropriately

- Yes, you can train your cat to scratch certain, approved items and train them not to scratch others.
  - Cats often stretch or scratch when they wake up, so place a scratcher near the cat's sleeping area.
  - Place a scratching post or pad near where the cat is currently scratching that is undesirable (e.g. in front of a couch leg, or door to the outside) as the changes in scent profile can result in cats re-marking that area.
  - If the cat scratches somewhere other than the scratching post or pad, pick them up, take them to the scratcher, and then provide a reward.
- Provide rewards and positive reinforcement.
  - Cats learn best through positive reinforcement.



- Immediately after you redirect your cat to use the new scratching post or pad (within 3 seconds), reward them to reinforce positive behavior.
- Try rewarding your cat with items they already like (i.e. treats, catnip, interactive play, and petting or grooming).

## Troubleshooting Inappropriate Scratching

Here is some general advice for common issues you may be experiencing with your cat:

- My cat is scratching an undesirable surface.
  - If the surface is near a window or door where your cat can see and/or smell another cat (or other smells), discourage or remove the unwanted cats from the yard, block window views, and use feline facial pheromones.
- My cat is scratching more.
  - Try to identify and address what may be causing your cat stress, anxiety, or frustration.
  - If your cat is stressed or anxious due to changes in the household (people, furniture, smells, etc.), and other options have not helped, discuss appropriate treatment to resolve distress or anxiety with your veterinarian.
  - Discuss any inter-cat issues immediately with your veterinarian.
  - Ensure that your cat has access to a complete set of resources, without being hidden or blocked from use.
  - Take note of your cats' daily routine and review it with your veterinarian.
  - Clean litter boxes regularly and ensure they are placed in multiple locations where one cat cannot block the path of the other (e.g. not in a hallway or near steps).

*For more detailed information, access these resources:*  
[Catfriendly.com/scratching](https://catfriendly.com/scratching)

