

Cover the inappropriate objects with something your cat will find unappealing, such as double-sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper, or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up. Or you may give the objects an aversive odor by attaching cotton balls containing perfume, a muscle rub, or other safe yet unpleasant substances. Be careful with odors, though, because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant.

When your cat is consistently using the appropriate object, it can be moved very gradually (no more than three inches each day) to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the appropriate scratching objects as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.

Don't remove the unappealing coverings or odors from the inappropriate objects until your cat is consistently using the appropriate objects in their permanent locations for several weeks, or even a month. They should then be removed gradually, not all at once.

### **Should I Punish My Cat for Scratching?**

**NO!** Punishment is effective only if you catch your cat in the act of scratching unacceptable objects and have provided them with acceptable scratching objects. Punishment after the fact won't change the behavior, may cause them to be afraid of you or the environment, and may elicit defensive aggression. Used by itself, punishment won't resolve scratching problems because it doesn't teach your cat where to scratch instead. If you do catch your cat in the act of scratching inappropriate

objects, punish them in a way that prevents them from associating the punishment with you.

Try making a loud noise (using a whistle, shaking a soda can filled with rocks, or slapping the wall) or using a water-filled squirt bottle. If you use other, more interactive techniques, they will learn to refrain from scratching in your presence but will continue to scratch when you're not around.

### **How Do I Trim My Cat's Claws?**

To help keep them sharp, cats keep their claws retracted until they're needed. As the claws grow too long and become curved, they can't be retracted completely. You should clip off the sharp tips of your cat's claws on their front feet every two weeks or so. Clipping your cat's claws will also help prevent them from becoming snagged in carpets and fabrics, not to mention your skin!

Before trimming your cat's claws, help them get accustomed to having their paws handled and squeezed. You can do this by gently petting their legs and paws while giving them a treat. This will help to make it a more pleasant experience.

Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes gentle squeezing, as you'll need to do this to extend the claw. Continue with the treats until your cat tolerates this kind of touching and restraint. It may take a little longer if they are not used to having their legs or paws handled.

Apply a small amount of pressure to her paw—with your thumb on top of their paw and

your index finger underneath—until a claw is extended. You should be able to see the pink or "quick," which is a small blood vessel. Don't cut into this pink portion, as it will bleed and be painful for your cat. If you cut off just the sharp tip of the claw, the "hook," it will dull the claw and prevent extensive damage to household objects and to your skin. There are several types of claw trimmers designed especially for pets. These are better than your own nail clipper because they won't crush the claw. Until you and your cat have become accustomed to the routine, one claw or foot a day is enough of a challenge. Don't push to do all of them at once, or you will both have only negative memories of claw clippers! Some people think a cat's scratching behavior is a reflection of their distaste for a couch's upholstery, a not-so-subtle hint to open the drapes, or a poorly conceived Zorro impersonation, but the fact is that cats scratch objects in their environment for many perfectly normal reasons.

### **Should I Declaw My Cat?**

Declawing is a procedure whereby a veterinarian amputates the end digit and claw of a cat's paws—similar in scope to cutting off a person's finger at the last joint. The Humane Society of the United States opposes declawing when done solely for the convenience of the owner. Scratching is a natural behavior for cats and can be directed to appropriate items. Declawing can also lead to litter box or aggression problems. However, if you feel that you must either declaw your cat or give them up, we would rather see your cat stay in their home and be your lifelong companion. If you do decide to have your cat declawed, we suggest that you have the surgery done at the same

time they are spayed (or neutered, if your cat is a male). Never have rear paws declawed, and be sure to always keep your cat indoors; without claws to defend themselves or climb to escape, your cat is in much greater danger outdoors—and the great outdoors is a very unsafe place for cats to begin with.

### Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats scratch for many reasons, including:

- To remove the dead outer layer of their claws.
- To mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent—they have scent glands on their paws.
- To stretch their bodies and flex their feet and claws.
- To work off energy.

Because scratching is a normal behavior and one that cats are highly motivated to display, it's unrealistic to try to prevent them from scratching. Instead, the goal in resolving scratching problems is to redirect the scratching onto acceptable objects.

### Training Your Cat to Scratch Acceptable Objects

You must provide objects for scratching that are appealing, attractive, and convenient from your cat's point of view. Start by observing the physical features of the objects your cat is scratching. The answers to the following questions will help you understand your cat's scratching preferences:

- Where are they located? Prominent objects, objects close to sleeping areas, and objects near the entrance to a room are often chosen.
- What texture do they have—are they soft or coarse?
- What shape do they have—are they horizontal or vertical?
- How tall are they? At what height does your cat scratch?

Now, considering your cat's demonstrated preferences, substitute similar objects for them to scratch (rope-wrapped posts, corrugated cardboard, or even a log). Place the acceptable object(s) near the inappropriate object(s) that they are already using. Make sure the objects are stable and won't fall over or move around when they use them.



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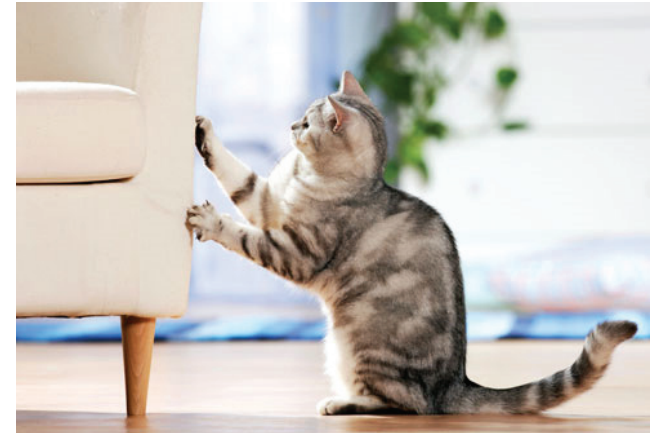
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*The Auburn Valley Humane Society is dedicated to providing shelter, quality care and love for all the lost, mistreated and abandoned animals in Auburn. AVHS utilizes all available resources to ensure each animal is placed into a loving and forever home and promotes responsible pet ownership through education and outreach.*

Adapted from material originally developed by applied animal behaviorists at the Dumb Friends League, Denver, Colorado.  
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# Cats: Destructive Scratching



## Auburn Valley Humane Society

*Changing lives...*

*four paws at a time!*