

ASPCA

How to Solve Kitty's Destructive Scratching

As all cat lovers know, our feline friends love to use their claws in all sorts of interesting ways. As part of their daily rituals, cats instinctually pull the claws on their front paws through surfaces that offer resistance. Cats who live outdoors favor logs and tree trunks for this purpose. Unfortunately, in a domestic setting, this instinct often translates to scaling the drapes or reupholstering a nubby sofa.

So what do you do if Fluffy is determined to redecorate your house in the latest version of feline-scratch chic?

First, what not to do: Please do not declaw your pet. The term “declaw” is a misnomer, as it implies the removal of a cat's claws only. In reality, declawing involves amputating the end of a cat's toes, and is comparable to removing your own fingernails as well as the bones to which they are attached. Ouch!! Declawing surgery also includes many risks, and is accompanied by severe pain.

The ASPCA is strongly opposed to declawing—and other elective surgeries such as debarking dogs—for the convenience of pet parents. One effective way to treat your cat's penchant for destructive scratching is to provide her with appropriate surfaces and objects to scratch, such as scratching posts made of cardboard, carpeting, wood, sisal or upholstery.

Check out these other helpful tips from our behaviorists:

- Encourage your cat to investigate posts by scenting them with catnip.
- Discourage inappropriate scratching by removing or covering attractive objects.
- Clip your cat's nails regularly.
- If you catch your cat in the act of scratching an inappropriate object, try startling him by clapping your hands or squirting him with water. (Use this procedure only as a last resort, because your cat may associate you with the startling event and learn to fear you.)

For more information about helping your pet overcome destructive scratching, please visit our Virtual Behaviorist.