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Chirrupsandchatter.com

Chirrup and Chatter offers educational lectures, workshops, and behavior consulting to shelters, veterinary hospitals, and animal organizations

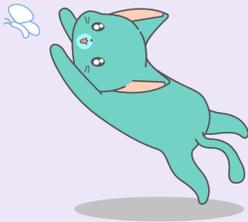
HOW TO STOP DESTRUCTIVE SCRATCHING IN CATS

Cats causing damage by scratching furniture and other household items is a common complaint among cat owners. Although this can be frustrating, it is important to remember that scratching is a normal and natural behavior for cats. Even though the urge for cats to scratch is normal, scratching places we feel are inappropriate, such as our couches and stairway posts, makes it a destructive behavior. Luckily, this is one that can be easily prevented and managed.

WHY DO CATS SCRATCH?

Scratching is an instinctive cat behavior, and it's vital for their physical and mental needs. By understanding your cat's scratching behavior, you can prevent damage to your home. There are various reasons why cats scratch including mobility, balance, and more:

TO MAINTAIN NECESSARY CLAW MOTION USED IN HUNTING AND CLIMBING



Cats are natural hunters and they use their claws to capture and hold prey. They also use this motion to exercise the forelimb muscles and spine to keep them in good condition for hunting.

EMOTIONAL OUTLET



Cats scratch to relieve stress and scratch when they become excited or aroused. Have you ever seen your cat slowly walk by another cat in your home and then begin scratching? They are releasing their frustration. Or, has your cat ever started scratching as soon as you come home from work? Your cat is excited to see you!

EXERCISE THAT STRENGTHENS AND STRETCHES THEIR MUSCLES



Scratching is a good form of exercise and helps to keep your cats in shape. They get to stretch out their bodies and extend and retract their nails. Just like many of us, cats like to stretch when they first wake up.

MARKING BEHAVIOR AND COMMUNICATION



Cats scratch to communicate with other cats. Their paw pads have scent glands, which leave odors behind when they scratch so that other cats know that they have been in the area. Scratching also leaves small gouges or tears, which are visual signals to other cats in the area.

FELINE NAIL CARE



When your cat scratches on an object, it removes the outer dead sheath of the nail and exposes the healthy new growth underneath. It is not uncommon to find crescent moon shaped nail sheaths around your cat's favorite scratching spots.

FUN

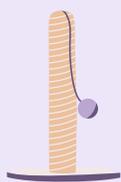


Cats love to stretch, scratch, and play!

Claws are important for mobility. Cats are digitigrade which means they walk on their toes. All of the cat's joints and muscles are designed to distribute weight onto the toes at a walk or a run. Claws are important for climbing, play or escape, and are important for cats to feel safe. Claws are useful for balance and cats use their claws to defend themselves during conflicts.

HOW CAN I PREVENT MY CAT FROM SCRATCHING?

The short answer is you can't. Scratching is a normal behavior for your cat. It is unreasonable to expect this behavior to simply not exist. Cats are going to scratch, and we need to provide appropriate outlets for them to express and experience this natural and instinctive behavior. **Do not punish your cat for scratching. Punishment does not teach the cat the wanted behavior and does not effectively communicate with your cat what you do want, can increase fear, anxiety, and stress, and could damage the bond between you and your cat.**



Work with your cat's current behavior to figure out what scratcher would be best. Study where your cat scratches. Is it horizontal? Vertical? What substrate is it most similar to? Cardboard? Wood? Sisal rope? Experiment with a variety of substrates and types of scratchers to determine which your cat prefers. Use catnip, silvertine, Feliscratch, or fun hanging toys to make their new scratchers extra appealing!



Scratchers should be sturdy and not wobbly or fall over when your cat is scratching them. Cat scratching posts need to be tall so your cat can stand on their hind legs and fully extend their body up the side of the post.



Our cats like to be with us, so place scratchers in areas where you spend time as well as where your cats spend their time. Cats often stretch or scratch when they wake up, so consider placing one near where your cats sleep. Cats also scratch when in a tense situation or as a way to displace anxiety. Locate and place scratchers in all the areas where you think your cats would appreciate it most.

The best way to stop your cat from scratching your belongings is not to fight against their very nature to stop them scratching at all, but to provide them with their own things to scratch! Have fun figuring out what works, provide lots of positive reinforcement with treats and pets when they scratch appropriately, and enjoy a peaceful happy household!



PAWS NEED CLAWS!

Scratching is a normal & instinctive behavior that is vital for their physical and mental needs.

