

SHOULD YOU DECLAW YOUR CAT?

Scratching is **normal** cat behavior. It grooms the front claws, is a way for cats to mark their presence and can help cats to stretch their muscles. Proper training to scratch on appropriate surfaces, combined with nail care, can prevent damage in the home.

There are many types of scratching posts. Some cats prefer to scratch on vertical surfaces, some on horizontal surfaces, so try to determine what your cat prefers and have an appropriate scratching post available for them. Vertical posts must be sturdy and tall enough for the cat to have a good stretch. Scratching materials preferred by cats include wood, sisal rope and a rough fabric. Locate scratching posts near areas favored by cats, such as windows and sleeping areas.

Start training your new kitten or cat to use scratching posts when first introduced to your home. Cats return to favorite or chosen scratching sites, so motivate them to use the post you select and avoid letting them use the furniture. This can be done by enticing your cat to the post when they wake up, rubbing catnip on the post and holding treats or toys partway up the post to encourage stretching and scratching. You can put an appealing toy, such as feathers, at the top of the post. Rewards can be given at each step- as the cat approaches the post, touches it and finally, scratches it. Never yell at or punish the cat.

If your cat is already scratching on an undesirable surface, look at the material it is made out of and whether it's horizontal or vertical. You can then make a post that mimics the undesirable surface. You can also place double-sided sticky tape on inappropriate areas and reward the use of the post.

Begin trimming nails in kittens and try to do this at least once a month. Other options are nail caps, applied every 4-6 weeks. These are available at pet stores and are glued onto the cat's nails. The soft plastic prevents furniture damage when the cat scratches.

Declawing is the amputation of the third digit of each toe. Generally, only the front feet are declawed. The procedure is done under a general anesthetic, surgical glue is used to close the incision and the paws are bandaged. Your cat will remain in the hospital overnight and will usually go home the next day. If your cat is older than 1 year of age, they will need to stay 2 nights in the hospital. Pain medication is given before, during and after the surgery and your cat will go home on pain medication. Local anesthetic blocks are also done to help prevent pain.

If you are going to have your cat declawed, it is best to do it when they are young. The bones are not yet calcified, the procedure is easier and the kittens recover much more quickly. The earliest we will do the procedure is 12 weeks of age or when they weigh 3 pounds. Potential complications from the procedure include infection and prolonged limping (this is more common in older cats).