

# Feline Behavior: Destructive scratching: What can you do?

## Why do cats scratch?

Scratching is an instinctual behavior like grooming or burying feces in the litter box. Scratching is used to mark objects (cats have scent glands in their paws), stretch muscles, remove old outside covering of nails and as a form of play. While it is not realistic to stop a cat from scratching, with training and patience you may be able to redirect scratching behavior in the house to acceptable surfaces and objects.

## Ways to deal with scratching:

### 1. Identify your cat's scratching preferences

Observe your cat carefully and see whether your cat prefers to scratch on carpets, drapes, wood, or some other surface. Does your cat scratch vertically, with paws stretched out above their head, or does your cat prefer horizontal surfaces? Once you have figured out your cat's preferred scratching materials and orientation, you will be better equipped to buy a scratching post that suits your cat's needs.

### 2. Provide items that match these preferences

A wide variety of scratching posts, cat trees, and condos with differing surface types are available for purchase which may help to redirect your cat's scratching behavior. You may improve the use of these objects by putting catnip underneath the carpet of the post. You might also consider bringing a clean tree stump into the house for your cat to scratch.

### 3. Make unacceptable items unavailable or less attractive to your cat

- Use double-sided sticky tape, sandpaper or upside down carpet runners with the knobs facing out on surfaces you don't want the cat to scratch.
- Because scratching has a scent-marking component, cats are more likely to re-scratch areas that already have their scent. To help break this cycle, try using a Pet friendly odor neutralizer to deodorize areas where your cat has previously scratched.

## Other helpful tips

- Provide your cat with toys, toys and lots of toys. The more acceptable toys they have to play with, the less likely they are to “play” with things they shouldn’t.
- Start trimming your cat’s claws as a young kitten and continue to trim every 2 weeks to keep them short where they will do less damage. Start slowly and use lots of praise and treats to help your cat adjust to having their nails trimmed. Be aware that it can be very difficult and sometimes impossible to train adult cats to allow you to trim their nails if they have never had their nails trimmed.
- Use nail covers such as Soft Paws and reapply every 2-4 weeks after trimming.
- Place potpourri around areas that you do not want the cat to scratch. Most cats don’t like the smell and will tend to avoid the area.
- Reward appropriate scratching behavior with love and treats. Rather than scolding your cat for inappropriate scratching, redirect scratching to appropriate objects and surfaces. Punishment is never appropriate as your cat is just doing what cats are supposed to do.
- **FELIWAY - Feline Facial Pheromone - See HANDOUT.**

## If all else fails - should I declaw my cat?

Declawing, or permanent removal of the claws, should be considered only as a last resort when the above strategies have been unsuccessful and in cases where a cat's scratching would lead to the surrendering of your cat. The decision to declaw is a personal decision, made by individuals and families with input from many sources including past experience, family, friends, neighbors and their veterinarian.

Lake Shore Pet Hospital believes that when a cat cannot be trained to refrain from using their claws destructively in the home, or poses a danger to family members, declawing is an acceptable option to euthanasia or becoming an outdoor only pet. We believe declawing should be performed only with the medically appropriate use of anesthetics and analgesics, carefully adhering to surgical and post-surgical protocols. We believe that declaw surgery should only be performed on the front feet, and that after the surgery these cats must remain as indoor-only cats.

In the end, the quality of a pet’s care is based on the strength of the bond between the pet and it’s family. If your cat is constantly being destructive in your home or poses a threat to your loved ones, this bond can be significantly harmed. We strongly encourage you to discuss the decision to declaw with your veterinarian, so that you might make an informed decision as to what is best for the future of your cat and your family.