

Behavior FAQ: Destructive Scratching Behavior

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Cats don't realize scratching damages your possessions—they're just doing what comes naturally. Cats scratch for many different reasons. The most important is to leave both visual and scent marks around their environment. Claw maintenance, stretching and playing are other reasons.

It's pretty much a losing battle to scold or punish your cat for the behavior. After all, scratching is normal and necessary behavior for cats. They can't stop scratching anymore than they can stop breathing.

The most effective way to stop your cat from scratching your furniture and other belongings is to give her something to scratch that meets her behavioral needs for scratching in the same way the off-limit items do. Put out several scratching posts in the areas the cat most likes to rest and play. For cats that have an established scratching problem, make the damaged scratching area unavailable or cover it with thick plastic so that it feels different and less appealing. Put the scratching post next to the damaged area and be sure it is covered with a material that is acceptable to the cat.

Most cats can be taught or retrained to scratch a post. Declawing cats is a very controversial topic that elicits strong feelings from both proponents and opponents. Talk with your veterinarian about the procedure and other options. Scratching problems can most often be taken care of with the right behavioral measures.

FIND A BEHAVIOR CONSULTANT TO HELP

Many problems are easily corrected through modification training, particularly if problems are addressed early. Find an animal behavior consultant in your area through one of the following Web sites: [American College of Veterinary Behaviorists](http://www.acvb.org), [International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants](http://www.iaabc.org) or [Animal Behavior Society](http://www.abn.org). Learn more by reading "Guidelines for Choosing a Trainer or Behavior Consultant."