



Understanding Scratching

The way in which we think about cats and their behavior should be the same in which we consider dog behavior, especially when it comes to scratching! The first thing to know is much like chewing is an instinctual and biologically driven need that dogs need to fulfill, cats need to be able to scratch. So, when you bring your new feline family member home, have realistic expectations – your cat WILL scratch! The best thing we can do as cat owners is to provide our cats with ample opportunity to scratch appropriate things so that they can make good choices.

Think about when a new dog owner brings a puppy home. They puppy proof their home because they know dogs will chew things.

Are You Saying All Cats Scratch?

Yes! How much they need to fulfill this need will be dependent on the individual cat and will change with age. So, what do you do? Have realistic expectations – to be forewarned is to be forearmed! Just like we advise adopters who take dogs home that they puppy proof – you need to kitty proof your home. Assume that your cat will scratch or climb (that's another need by the way) and knock over your knick knacks etc. So, prepare your home before bringing your new feline home. This will save you and your cat some stress down the road.

Why?

Did you know that even declawed cats will go through the motions of scratching? This is because it is an instinctual biological drive and satisfies important needs. Cats are territorial animals that communicate through scent and they have quite a few scent glands, some of which are located around the pads of their feet.

- Scratching in their territory is a way for them to communicate to you and to other animals in their home.
- Scratching helps them upkeep their nails and will help them shed dead claw sheaths.
- Scratching provides a way for them to alleviate pent up energy, boredom and is a way for them to show happiness.
- Scratching provides a way for them to fully stretch their backs.

What Kind of Scratcher?

Just like we provide ample varieties of toys for puppies to choose from, we should provide various types of scratchers (horizontal, vertical, carpet, cardboard, sisal etc.) because s/he might have preferences! One important thing to keep in mind, is that in order for scratching posts to be fully effective, they must be able to stretch the cats' back muscles. For an adult cat, the vertical scratcher should be at least 3 feet tall to achieve a full stretch. Most cats prefer a vertical scratcher that is at least 3 feet tall, made out of sisal that has multiple levels. A cat tree is a great way to meet various preferences for your cat.

Location, Location, Location

Cats scratch to communicate, so you will want to make sure that you place your scratcher in a room where the family spends most of their time. Buying scratchers and placing them in the guest room will most likely not get used very much. If you are finding that your cat is still using your furniture, place an appropriate scratching toy next to the place your cat seems most attracted to. You can make the scratching toy more enticing by putting catnip on it.

Good, Cat!

Guess what? You can use positive reinforcement training with cats too! Is your cat using his/her scratcher like a good cat? Reward that good behavior with a special treat, attention and praise. Just like puppies take time to train, your cat will need a lot of consistent reinforcement to get the hang of it as well.

Other Tips:

We know that puppies have a lot of energy and that we need to exercise them daily so they are well balanced. Cats need exercise too! Cats that do not get enough exercise have pent up energy and we need to play with them to provide a healthy outlet. So, grab a laser pointer and have fun watching your cat chase that red dot. Toys that mimic a cat's natural prey are usually the most preferred (mice and toys with feathers).