

# Scratching Behavior in Cats



Scratching behavior in cats fulfills several functions, including leaving a visual and scent mark (from glands between their toes) on objects, conditioning the claws, stretching the body and exercising the muscles and tendons involved in using the claws. It is an innate behavior, in other words one that doesn't need to be taught and even declawed cats have a need to scratch.

In outdoor cats, scratching tends to occur along regularly traveled routes rather than at a territory boundary. The same claw-marking sites tend to be used over and over again in both indoor and outdoor cats. Outdoor cats tend to use trees or fence boards. Indoor cats may choose a variety of scratching targets, including furniture and carpeting. Some like horizontal surfaces and others prefer vertical. Some use both. You may need to try a few types of scratching devices to find one or more your pet enjoys. Scratching posts should be tall enough for the cat to reach up and stretch. Some cats like scratching boards with cardboard inserts while others may prefer a carpeted post or one wrapped with rope.

In the home, as outdoors, cats will often scratch objects along regularly traveled routes, so that's where the scratching post(s) should be. Since it's a marking behavior, the cat will often choose a very prominent location to scratch – which can be very aggravating to the owner! If your cat uses more than one spot, you should place a post or scratching board in both places. If you put it in a back room somewhere the cat is unlikely to use it. Many cats stretch and claw right after waking up as well so having a post near a place where your cat sleeps may be helpful.

If you are getting rid of a piece of furniture your cat has damaged, consider saving a piece of it or some of the fabric to make into a scratching post. You already know the cat likes that particular material. Put the new post right by the new piece of furniture – hopefully the cat will target the familiar and not the new. Putting some double sided sticky tape on the new furniture may discourage scratching there, or you can use plastic or aluminum foil to cover the new furniture for a while. Placing cat nip on the new post can help as well. You can also play with your cat around the new post.

You can find a scratching post fastened to a feeder, called Pavlov's Cat, at [goodpetstuff.com](http://goodpetstuff.com). When the cat scratches the device, it rotates and dispenses food into a bowl, thus giving the cat a food reward for scratching.

In most cases, a cat can be taught to use a scratching post rather than its owner's possessions. With a little time and effort most cats respond well as long as its own preferences are taken into account.



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