



Furniture Scratching Explained

Furniture scratching. So many people are convinced this is a [behavior](#) displayed by [cats](#) just for the sheer thrill of destroying the living room sofa or treasured antique chair. If you live with a cat who has turned your upholstery into mere shreds, you're probably at your wit's end in terms of whether keeping kitty means abandoning all hope over ever having intact furniture again



The [problem](#) is that you might've gone at this the wrong way. You were trying to train your cat to NOT do something that is actually a normal and essential part of being feline.

Cat Scratching is Normal

Scratching is important and more complex than you may realize. You may be under the misconception that scratching is merely kitty's attempt to sharpen his [claws](#) to razor-sharp perfection or that the behavior is based on a willful attempt to get back at you or destroy his surroundings.

In truth, scratching serves many purposes. In addition to conditioning the claws, it's a very effective way for the cat to stretch his back and shoulder muscles.

Territorial Marking in Cats

Scratching also serves as a marking behavior for cats. The marks left on an object when the cat rakes his claws vertically create a visual sign for others who pass by. In an [outdoor](#) setting, these visual markers are important because they provide any approaching cats to see that they're entering an area where another cat has been or is currently residing. This advance warning system can reduce the number of actual

physical confrontations cats may otherwise have.



When the cat scratches an object he also leaves an olfactory mark by way of scent glands in the paw pads. This way, should another cat approach the scratch mark, he would be able to gather information from the pheromones (scent chemicals).

Scratching is a Stress-Reliever For Your Kitty

Scratching is also used as an emotional release or displacement behavior. When your cat is anxious, happy, excited or frustrated, he can release some of that built-up emotion by scratching. Think of the times you've seen your cat scratching on an object after a nap or when you've come home from work. You may even have noticed him scratching after an encounter with a companion cat. This emotional release through scratching is healthy for the cat.

Since scratching is so complex, and a vital part of feline life, you'll need an effective training method to redirect kitty. You can't just shoo him away from the sofa. You have to provide a [scratching post](#) that meets his needs. The behavior modification technique begins by making sure you have a scratching post that meets the qualifications: appealing texture, tall enough, stable, and placed in a good location. In general, the most appealing texture for cats is sisal. The rough texture makes it easy for cats to dig their claws in and get an effective scratch. Carpet-covered posts are too soft and don't meet the needs of most cats when they're looking for a place to

scratch. Additionally, many cats end up getting their claws caught in the carpet loops.



Not Just Any Scratching Post

The height of the scratching post should enable the cat to get a full stretch. If the post is too small the cat has to hunch over to use it and that doesn't allow for a good back and neck stretch. If that's the case, kitty will probably seek out a taller option, and I'll bet you can figure out what that option will be – your sofa! Make sure the tall post is also very stable. A tall post needs a wide base in order to prevent it from toppling over the first time kitty leans against it.

Location, Location, Location When it Comes to Scratching

Even a great scratching post will just gather dust if you stick it in some far off [location](#). When a cat needs to scratch he'll look for the closest object that meets his needs. Keep the post where kitty likes to spend time.

If you have more than one cat, you'll need more than one scratching post. Although you can't specifically assign a post to a specific cat, if you place the posts in areas where the different cats tend to spend the most time, you may find they may just claim the posts on their own.

For cats who like to scratch horizontally, there are inexpensive corrugated cardboard scratching pads available at your local pet product store.

Substitute the *Can't* Scratch with the *Can* Scratch

If your cat has been scratching a piece of furniture, place the scratching post right next to it. You can cover the piece of furniture with a sheet, if the area being scratched is isolated to just a few spots, place a few strips of *Sticky Paws* on it. This is a double-faced tape made specifically for this purpose. The product is available at your local pet product store. This way, when the cat comes over to scratch the furniture, he'll see the area isn't as [appealing](#) and at the same time, he'll notice the much better option in the form of a top of the line scratching post.

Make a Scratching Post at Home

For step-by-step instructions on how to make a homemade scratching post or for more specific help on furniture scratching issues, refer to the book [Think Like a Cat](#) by [Pam Johnson-Bennett](#).