

Scratch This Not THAT

Save your furniture by teaching good behaviors in acceptable places.

..... by **RITA REIMERS**



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One of the most common distress calls I receive is from cat parents upset about their cat's destructive claws. While we humans may feel like our cats must secretly hate us (why else would they ruin our brand-new designer sofa?!), they're really just following their natural instincts when they do a little redecorating with their claws.

Why cats scratch

Scratching is a necessary part of every cat's life. Using those claws helps your cat strengthen the muscles in his paws and, at the same time, it hastens the shedding of the outer lay-

ers of the nails to keep them clean and new. It's the feline version of going to the nail salon.

Cats also scratch to claim territory. Using the scent glands in his paws, your cat leaves his mark on the places he likes best to let other felines know to stay away. It's part of his natural hunting instincts, done to keep his claws at the ready for the next big pursuit.

Simply put, cats must scratch to maintain good paw and nail health. In nature, this would be necessary so they can hunt for their dinner. Plus, it just feels good.

You'll never be able to stop your cat from scratching, but you can redirect those urges to more acceptable places.

Get your cat to love his scratcher



OFFER APPEALING SCRATCHING ITEMS to redirect your cat's need to scratch. There are many types of scratching posts and pads available, and observing how your cat uses his claws will help you choose the right style.

- ❖ If your cat is a rug scratcher, a flat horizontal scratching pad or box works best.
- ❖ Cats who like to claw on sofas tend to prefer a vertical scratching post.

Offer your cat a variety of types and textures, so he won't get bored with just one. Scratchers let your cat flex his paws and keep his nails filed, while keeping him away from your rug and furniture.

PUT SCRATCHING PADS AROUND YOUR HOME where your cat likes to hang out. A place central to the household's action is ideal, especially if it's a place where you tend to be. If you tuck scratching pads



away from everyone, your cat won't go out of his way to find and use them.

PUT CATNIP ON THE SCRATCHER, and lead your cat toward it with toys and treats. When he chooses the scratching post over your sofa, give him praise and a yummy treat to make it a memorable positive experience. Should you find him scratching your sofa or carpet, gently guide him to the "good" scratching spots and give him a treat. Bribery works, and he'll soon get the idea that he gets a reward when he uses the pads and posts instead of the sofa.

GIVE YOUR CAT LOTS OF LOVE and playtime. Boredom can cause your cat to create his own excitement by attacking your furniture, enabling him to release his pent-up energy at the expense of your décor. Play with your cat daily to tire him out, so he won't redecorate your house with his claws.

No-scratch zone

Let your cat know that certain places in your home are off-limits to his paws of destruction. Protect sofas and chairs by making them unpleasant for your cat to touch. Cover sofas and chairs temporarily with plastic to make it impossible for claws to take hold. Use double-sided sticky tape on furniture, as cats don't like the sticky feel. You can also spray furniture and carpets with an orange-scented spray, as most cats don't like the smell of citrus.

If you do find your cat clawing the no-no places, clap your hands or throw a soft toy for him to chase so he's distracted. Because your cat must scratch somewhere, have appropriate scratching alternatives available to guide him to those "good" scratching places and away from the no-no spots. 🐾

Rita Reimers' Cat Behavior Coaching has helped many cat owners better understand their feline friends. Visit RitaReimers.com to read her cat behavior blog or to book a cat behavior coaching session. Rita is also the CEO/owner of JustForCatsPetsitting.com. Connect with her on Facebook and on Twitter at [@theCatAnalyst](https://twitter.com/theCatAnalyst).



Cats scratch to strengthen the muscles in their paws, shed the outer layer of their nails, to claim territory and because it feels good.

Trim Those Nails!

Trimming your cat's nails regularly renders them relatively harmless. You can take your cat to a groomer or learn to do it yourself at home. If you've never trimmed a cat's nails before, ask your veterinarian to show you exactly where to cut.

You can also put **nail caps** over your cat's front claws to make them harmless to the objects in your home. You can put them on your cat at home or have your veterinarian or groomer do it for you. Nail caps last about six weeks and come in many fun colors, too.