



## Cat Scratching – Friend or Foe?

If you've recently added a kitten to your home, it may be a reminder of just how sharp those kitten claws can be, and how destructive!

A cat's drive to scratch is a fascinating, normal and utterly essential behavior. Some human companions try to stop a cat from scratching, but this may be a losing proposition from the get-go. It seems much more effective to allow them to scratch, and just try to redirect where they exhibit the behavior.

Cats scratch for many reasons, but destroying your furniture is simply not on the list. When they scratch, they stretch out their back and shoulder muscles, keeping them fit and limber. It's also a way to territorially mark items, a throwback to their time in the wild. Their mark is both visible (much to your chagrin) and scented. Chemicals in the scent glands of their pads are released, marking the item as officially "theirs". If you allow your cat to roam outside, it's even more important that they can "mark" their area, which serves as a warning system to other cats, and helps avoid nasty confrontations. You'll see your cat scratch when they are both happy and when they're frustrated. So this behavior can be like a smile or a pounding of the fist. Bottom line, it's a release they just might need.

The best way to deal with unwanted scratching is to redirect it. Whenever you stop them from scratching the table leg, you should put them near an object designed to be scratched (a scratching post, for instance). Make sure this item is stable, high enough so that they can fully stretch out when they scratch and in a location that is comfortable for the kitty. If you find they like to hang out in a certain area of a room, that's your ideal spot. Some cats prefer to scratch, and stretch, horizontally. Use the same redirection technique but use an inexpensive cardboard scratching pad which can be purchased at most pet stores.

If you have the time and the skill, Pinterest (and the Internet in general) is full of ideas on making your own scratching stations for cats and kittens. They seem like fun weekend projects as well. Maybe you'll even have a little helper by your side, testing your creation!