



## Starting from Scratch

Save the furniture by investing in scratching posts for your cat

**D**oes your cat use your best sofa or dining room table leg as a scratching post?

While cat scratching is frustrating for pet guardians, it is a natural behaviour for cats. Understanding why (and where) your cat likes to scratch can help redirect the behaviour to appropriate places.

Cats scratch for a few different reasons. The first is to communicate. When your cat scratches, she leaves a visual marker that tells other cats she was there (even when you have a single cat). Plus, she also leaves behind a scent mark. Your cat has special glands in her feet that release a scent as she scratches. After a while, the smell fades away. So she returns to the same spot to scratch and redeposit her scent.

A second reason your cat scratches is to condition her claws. Over time, claws become frayed and worn out.

By scratching, your cat sheds the old outer layer of her claws and exposes the new, sharper ones underneath.

Finally, cats scratch as part of their stretching behaviour and they routinely like to scratch after a nap. Your cat uses her claws to anchor her down as she stretches her paw, back and leg muscles.

While you may still have some scratching on your furniture, you can vastly reduce scratching by first thinking like a cat and taking steps to provide her with allowable scratching surfaces. In a typical home, two to three scratching posts are a must.

Cats like to scratch in areas that are very visible. Place scratching posts in prominent locations in your home – near the front door and close to the hub of family areas. If the arm of your favourite chair is currently being scratched, place a scratch post

in front. Once your cat is using the scratch posts regularly, over time you can move them to more discrete locations.

Scratching posts need not be large and fancy, but texture is important. Cats prefer materials they can really sink their claws into, so try scratching posts made from carpet, sisal rope, corrugated cardboard or wood. Cats are fussy, so experiment with different surfaces for her to scratch.

Cats also scratch in different directions, either by reaching up or by reaching out in front. A scratching post should be at least as tall or long as your cat when she is fully stretched out. They also like sturdy objects to scratch, not ones that wobble or slide along the floor.

A heavily used scratching post, though not as nice to look at, is a sign your cat approves of it. Resist the urge to replace it too often, but if your cat starts to use that favourite chair leg again, it may be time to pony up for a new scratching post. ■

### CATS NEED CLAWS!

Some cat guardians mistakenly believe the solution to cat scratching is to declaw their cat.

Claws grow from the ends of a cat's third toe bones. Declawing is a surgical procedure that removes not only the claws, but all or part of the cat's third toe bones too.

Declawing is a painful procedure for cats to recover from; they feel chronic pain for weeks after the surgery. They may lie in a hunched-up position and be reluctant to move or put weight on their sore feet. After surgery, other normal cat behaviours like digging in the litter box are difficult too.

Instead of removing your cat's claws, it is possible to trim your cat's nails every one to two weeks. Keeping them blunt means your cat will still be able to scratch but will do less damage when she does. Should your family have difficulty trimming her claws, a veterinarian can do it for you for a small fee. □

*Guest CatSense columnist Meghann Cant is an animal welfare educator with the BC SPCA.*

