

## Why do Cats need their claws?

Claws are a cat's main defense if they are in danger. When frightened, a cat may feel defenseless without claws and could resort to biting as an alternative defense. Cats also use their claws to grip when enjoying a long stretch that tones the muscles in their back and shoulders. They also rely on this gripping ability when walking and jumping.

Cats sometimes scratch to remove the outer sheaths of their claws, but often do it to mark territory both visibly and through scent glands located on the pads of their feet. Finally, scratching can be a way for cats to express happiness. If you've ever come home to your cat running for the scratching post, this can simply mean that she is happy to see you and is using scratching as an emotional release!

## If scratching is natural, how can I prevent it from being destructive?

Despite their reputation for being independent, cats can be trained to scratch appropriately in a way that redirects undesirable behavior and rewards good behavior.

First, find a surface that your cat likes scratching more than the sofa, such as a scratching post. A good scratching post should be at least three feet tall on a sturdy base, placed in a visible location and allow a complete vertical reach for the cat. Inexpensive cardboard scratchers sprinkled with catnip and placed on the floor are a good alternative to carpet for cats who prefer to scratch horizontally.

Trimming a cat's claws regularly is a simple way to reduce damage caused by scratching. Trimming is easy when a cat is introduced to it at a young age. Your veterinarian can show you how to safely trim your cat's nails. Or, if you prefer, many groomers and pet stores offer walk-in nail trimming for a reasonable price.

Cats use their claws for many purposes. Unfortunately, many loving cat owners aren't aware of the ill effects of declawing until it is too late. With proper education, patience and a little positive reinforcement, your cat can continue to scratch happily without your home paying the price!

Contact Animal Friends at 412.847.7000 if you need help training your cat to scratch appropriately. Your kitty (and your furniture) will thank you!

## Why Cats Have Claws ... and How to Live With Them

### Thinking of Declawing?

Have you considered declawing your cat as an easy way to protect your furniture? Before taking this irreversible step, you should understand how declawing works and what it means for both you and your cat.

Scratching is a healthy and natural activity for cats and doesn't have to be destructive – there are ways to modify your cat's scratching habit!

### What is declawing?

Declawing is more than just a surgical procedure to remove a cat's nails. The veterinarian actually amputates the tips of the cat's toes, cutting bones and nerves in order to remove the entire claw, equivalent to cutting of the tips of your fingers at the outermost joint.

Not only is declawing painful, it typically takes 7-10 days for a cat's toes to heal, during which time they cannot step into grainy litter because of the risk of infection. This can lead to negative association with the litterbox which frequently means inappropriate soiling outside the box.

