

## The Importance of Scratching

**A feline behaviorist explains why cats need to scratch.**

*Pam Johnson-Bennett*

Q. Why do cats need scratching posts?

Feline behaviorist Pam Johnson-Bennett, author of *Think Like a Cat*, says:

Scratching is such a complex and important behavior for cats. Scratching serves as a visual marker and that's vital to survival in the wild. A cat will use his claws to scratch on a tree to mark territory. The visual mark can be seen at a distance and that keeps opponents far away. When the cat scratches he also releases scent chemicals from glands located in his paw pads. This way, he is leaving both a visual and olfactory mark.

Scratching is also a vital way cats stretch their back and shoulder muscles.

When a cat scratches on a scratching post or other rough material, he always removes the dead outer sheath of the nail and that keeps his nails in good condition.

Another important but often overlooked aspect of scratching is that it serves as an emotional outlet for cats. When a cat is very happy or anxious or unsure, he often goes to the scratching post as a displacement behavior. When I come home at the end of the day my cats run to their scratching posts because they are so excited.

Because of the importance of scratching posts, it's crucial that when choosing one, you pick the appropriate type. Too often, people pick fluffy carpet-covered posts and cats don't like those kinds. Choose a sisal-covered post or one with a rough texture.

Best,  
Pam Johnson-Bennett, CABC  
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