

Scratching the Surface

Understanding this basic behavior can salvage your furniture and save your relationship with your cat.

Marty Becker, DVM, and Janice Willard, DVM

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For the best results, place scratching posts in prominent locations near areas your cat frequents. Increase interest in the post by rubbing it with catnip or playing around it with a toy. Drag a toy over the post and let your cat experience sinking its claws into the sturdy object.

"You can even take your cat, if it is a cat that will comfortably tolerate this, and gently holding its paws, initiate scratching on the post a few times," Crowell-Davis said. "If a cat responds to treats or praise, then reward it for using its post."

3. Pull the Wrong Objects Some people suggest using a squirt of air or water from a bottle, or rattling cans at the cat when it scratches inappropriate objects. However, we suggest that you not punish or frighten your cat for scratching on the wrong objects because: The cat will make the connection between the punishment and your presence. All you may train the cat to do is to not scratch when you are present. Punishment strains the trust that is implicit in the human-animal bond. The cat will not understand why you are suddenly outraged and scaring it while it is just responding to a natural drive. Some sensitive cats may even become frightened of you. Punishing a natural behavior can cause conflict in the cat. Imagine if something unpleasant happened when you yawned, and you never knew when yawning was going to be a relaxing experience or a frightening one. It won't stop your need to yawn, but it would increase your anxiety when you did yawn.

Instead, as you pull your cat to new scratching surfaces, discourage it from scratching the inappropriate surfaces. Place temporary barriers that prevent the cat from scratching on its preferred furniture location. You can tack up carpet runners or place plywood in front of the scratching location while re-training the cat.

"Another deterrent is olfactory," Crowell-Davis said. "Hang room deodorizers, get commercial cat repellent or set a bowl of strong spices next to the object and see if, by olfactory cues, you can make that place less pleasant for the cat."