



# Paw Prints

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Columnist

## Cat scratch chatter

Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. That's why your feline friend doesn't understand why you get so bent out of shape when he claws that tempting couch arm or carpet. Cats do not scratch furniture with malicious contempt.

Cats scratch for a variety of reasons: to remove the dead outer layer of their claws, to mark their territory by leaving both a visual mark and a scent (they have scent glands on their paws), to exercise, and to stretch their muscles. It's one of their primal, instinctual urges. And it's something that felines do their whole lives

Observations of feral cats and other outdoor felines show that they are frequently territorial, letting other cats know of their presence, and one way they mark their territory is by scratching tree trunks, posts, the corners of buildings or other conspicuous objects in their environment. This behavior, animal

behaviorists believe, leaves clear visual marks as well as scent marks for other cats.

When you have an indoor kitty, she must find a substitute scratching spot. A cat scratching post is the next best thing, but if there aren't any in the home, your furry friend will have to resort to anything she can find, including furniture and carpet. It's only natural.

Check out the area of the couch that your feline friend scratches, most likely it's the same place every time. The scratched surface leaves a highly visible mark that can be easily seen by other cats, even if you only have one cat. It's instinctive. It's a territorial warning or just a marker that announces that "Kitty" lives here.

It's up to you to appeal to their instincts using cat psychology. You can encourage good scratching behaviors by keeping several designated scratching posts or scratchers around the house.

Kittens begin to develop their scratching preferences at a young age. Don't worry if your kitten starts scratching on something you prefer to keep off limits. You can easily redirect her to a more appropriate item, such

as her scratching post while she's still learning scratching behaviors.

Most cats are attracted to anything with a nubby, coarse, or textured surface, something they can really sink their claws into.

Some cats like to stand up against a vertical surface; others get horizontal and stick their butts in the air for a good stretch.

And yes, cats have definite preferences on what texture they like to scratch. Once you've figured out your cat's preferences, you're halfway to the finish line.

To keep Kitty away from furniture, try using double-sided sticky tape that cats hate to feel on their paws, at least until your furry feline friend learns that it's more fun to claw the new scratching post.

Scratching posts and pads are available in all shapes, sizes and materials.

A sturdy, rope-covered upright post; a flat scratch pad made of corrugated cardboard, the back side of a carpet square or even a small log with the bark still on can make excellent scratching pads.

A scratching object can be free-standing, lie on the

floor or even hang from a doorknob. Experiment to find out what Kitty prefers.

Pam Johnson Bennett, a certified cat behaviorist, says the most appealing texture for cats is sisal (a type of rope material). The rough texture makes it easy to dig their claws in and get an effective scratch.

So, make sure your cat's scratching post meets the right qualifications: appealing texture, tall enough, stable and placed in a good location.

And yes, putting the scratchers in the right places is also important. Try placing them right next to the object they tend to scratch as an attractive alternative. If it's carpeting, place the scratchers in the spots they tend to claw.



PHOTO BY JODI SCHNEIDER MCNAMEE

A good scratching spot for kitty.

Remember to try to duplicate what your cat has chosen to scratch. For instance, if Kitty is scratching the wooden legs of your table, maybe your cat's new scratching post needs to be made of wood.

A great way to get your cat to use the new scratching post is to sprinkle catnip on the post once a week.

Keeping a suitable scratching surface in different areas of the house can help encourage appropriate scratching behavior.

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