

Scratching Behavior

(aka: why you need a good scratching post)

Your cat has a physical need to scratch. It is how he relieves tension, exercises muscles, leaves scent and marks territory. Every cat needs a scratching post that fulfills his need to scratch. When cats don't have an appropriate object on which to scratch, they often seek out other viable options, such as the sofa. If you are bringing a new cat into your home, having an appropriate scratching post from the very first day is essential. Ideally, it will become the focus for all scratching activity and prevent problems from developing.

What cats want and need in a post:

- **Strong, rough and sturdy.** Most scratching posts are made without consideration of what a cat really needs to scratch. They are made out of the wrong materials and are too short and too unstable. Cats don't want to scratch short, fluffy, wobbly things. Pretty fluffy posts may be appealing to you, but most cats find them useless.
- **Size matters.** A post should be as high as your cat is tall when he is fully stretched out plus a few inches. The post should also be wide enough that your cat can sit on top and survey his surroundings. The base should be sturdy enough that the post will not tip over. Once a post tips over on a cat it is very hard to convince a cat to use the post again. The post should be wrapped with sisal rope, or some other material that the cat can "dig its nails" into.
- **Cardboard can be great.** In addition to the big posts, many cats like the corrugated cardboard scratchers. These come in many varieties (flat, round and sloped) and are available at most pet supply stores. They do not last forever, but they are portable and can easily be tucked next to a couch or a bed.
- **Catnip can be wonderful.** To introduce the post to your cat you may want to use catnip as a lure for older cats (kittens younger than 5 months of age are not affected by catnip). Rub the catnip right into the rope so that the cat can smell that wonderful smell. Once your cat has smelled the catnip scratch your nails, gently, along the surface of the rope. This will help teach your cat where to scratch. Once your cat begins to scratch, praise your cat or give him a special treat.

Tips:

- Trim your cats claws at least every two weeks. If you haven't done this before, ask us to show you or consult your veterinarian.
- If your cat is using a certain corner of the couch for a scratching post, place the post right by that corner of the couch. Cover that corner of the couch with double-sided sticky tape that is completely unattractive to your cat (the tape can easily be removed for entertaining company). This will repel your cat away from your couch and right there is a post that they will love.

Remember: A good post can help save your furniture! However, if these suggestions do not work for you, please contact us at 703-746-4774 and let us help find an effective solution for you and your cat.

