



Scratching, Biting & De-clawing



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Here's how you can tame that inner lion and make your kitty the family-friendly pet he or she should be.

Train them while they're young

There is no better time to get your kitten used to having their nails trimmed than when she is young. Start now and have your vet show you how to trim the nails. Soft Paws are nail coverings that as your cat gets older, you can apply to help prevent trauma to furniture if you have a truly out-of-control cat. However, in most cases, simple training should be enough.

The scoop on scratching and biting

Cats usually bite and scratch when they become overly excited playing with their human friends. You can teach a cat to retract her claws by stopping playtime whenever the claws come out. If your cat does retract, praise her and resume playing. Perhaps even better is to learn your cat's tendencies for clawing and to stop play before the cat gets overly excited.

If kitty does bite, let her know she is hurting you by saying, "OUCH!" End playtime and walk away. This effective deterrent works because kittens and cats love to play with their owners. Ending playtime teaches your pet that rough behavior is not acceptable.

Your cat has a predatory nature. Giving her toys to play with instead of hands

and feet helps her act this out and expend her energy. A scratching post can be an invaluable tool. By giving your cat active and regular playtime, she will be less likely to scratch you.

Clawing behavior: There is hope

Scratching is a natural and important behavior for cats. It helps them stay limber and aids in the shedding of their claw sheath, like a snake shedding skin. But when cats turn their claws on furniture or carpets, this behavior is annoying and destructive. Luckily, there are effective and humane ways to modify and redirect a cat's need to scratch.

Don't de-claw!

Even if you have exhausted all possible methods of training your cat not to scratch, de-clawing your pet is not the solution. De-clawing is not a simple removal of the claws. It is a surgical amputation. In addition, a de-clawed cat suffers both physical and psychological repercussions as a result of such amputation.

Removing the claws causes pain in her paws, as well as a distrust of humans and a



tendency to bite. Patience and consistency—not surgery—are the keys for a well-trained cat.

Although it may seem to be the only permanent solution, de-clawing cats is neither humane nor effective. The surgery involves cutting off the entire first joint of the toe in a painful procedure that has long-lasting physical and emotional effects on cats. De-clawed cats can develop debilitating arthritis as they age. Having lost their first line of defense, they are easily stressed and often become biters. Many also stop using their litter boxes because of the pain they feel in their paws while trying to cover up their waste.

Scratch their itch to scratch

A much-better alternative to de-clawing is to give your cat a scratching surface that is agreeable to both of you. A good scratching post should be sturdy and at least three feet tall to allow the cat a full stretch. Place the post near your cat's favorite sleeping area. If you have the space, your cat will appreciate having more than one post to use. Look for posts covered with the backside of carpet, thick burlap, plain wood, or a durable hemp-like material called sisal. Avoid the ones with carpet or upholstery fabric—exactly the surfaces you want your cat not to claw. You can also make the post irresistible by sprinkling or spraying catnip on it, and by tying on a favorite toy for the cat to play with.

Praise, don't punish

It is important to praise your cat when she claws in the correct place. If she scratches something inappropriate, distract her with a loud noise, such as pennies in a soda can. Never use physical punishment; it may cause your cat to fear you and to avoid scratching the forbidden area only when you are around.

Cat-scratch deterrents

You can distract her from inappropriate areas by spraying a deterrent or placing strips of double-sided tape on the areas. These products can be purchased at your local pet supply store. If your cat continues to scratch in an inappropriate area, place a post there. Another option is to use plastic nail coverings called Soft Paws. They can be purchased and applied by your veterinarian. This is a humane alternative to de-clawing your cat.

Keep those claws trimmed

You can also clip your cat's nails regularly. This procedure is easy, and when done correctly does not hurt the cat. It is easy to condition your cat to accept nail trimming, but you must have patience and pick the right time. The very worst time is when the pet is alert and active. Handle the paw very gently, use a sharp pair of trimmers, and quickly take off the tip of the nail. Don't cut into the pink area of the nail, as this will cause it to bleed. Give your cat a treat when you are done. You may only get one nail done at a time until your cat is comfortable with the process.

If you've never trimmed your cat's claws before, **have your vet show you how to do it properly so you can avoid injury.** With patience, praise, and love you can redirect your cat's clawing action in an effective and humane way. 🐾