

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Paws Off! (Preventing Destructive Behaviors)

Cats typically enjoy scratching, leaping, pouncing around, and exploring. These are all natural behaviors, but sometimes these behaviors can be damaging to furniture, carpet, walls, curtains, and other household items. If this is a concern to you, we have suggestions to help keep your furniture and belongings safe while also allowing your cat to engage in their natural behaviors.

Cat-proofing your home

Make sure your home is kitty proof from any loose wires, string, or small and sharp objects. Like crawling babies, a cat's face is closer to the ground so they are going to notice a lot of things that people walking around may miss. Make sure to wrap and secure wires so cats aren't using them as toys. We also recommend securing furniture that might fall, like bookcases or tall dressers, if the cat jumps on them. You can connect them to the wall with wire or you can use shim wedges at the bottom of the bookcase.

How can I get my cats to stop scratching on furniture?

Cats naturally like to scratch on things to help shed and file their nails. This also gives them the opportunity to get a good stretch in. Cats exhibit scratching behavior from a young age, which is completely normal. The ideal time to train cats to use a scratching post and get them used to nail trims are when they're young, but learning can still be taught at an older age. Pet owners should not consider declawing as prevention for unwanted scratching.

Please see our "**Effects of Declawing**" flyer for more information on declawing.

If your cat is scratching on your furniture, we recommend a two-step approach: give your cat an alternative item to scratch on and make the inappropriate spots they currently scratch on less attractive to them.

Step 1: Scratching Post Allure

It is important for your cat to have their own personal nail filing station (like a cat tree or scratching post) so they have an appropriate outlet to scratch. If you already have a scratching post and it doesn't pique your cat's interest, try adding some catnip to it. Not all cats react catnip, but when they do they go completely nuts for it! Reward your cat for using the scratching post by giving them verbal praise, petting, and treats after they finish scratching – you don't want to interrupt the good behavior.

Keep in mind that cats have different preferences for the way they like to scratch and stretch. Some prefer vertical surfaces, while others prefer horizontal. Some like scratching on sisal, some prefer cardboard, and others carpet. There are a whole variety of pre-made scratching items you can purchase, but you can also make your own. We recommend observing your cat to see what areas they scratch naturally – are they scratching horizontally on the rug, or do they seem to like vertical surfaces like the curtains? You can use their natural preferences to inform your purchases. We also recommend trying out a few different types of scratching posts so you can narrow down your cat's favorite(s), and then make sure those are readily available for them to use.

Cats use pheromones as a means to communicate and interact with the world around them, sending different types of messages. Feliscratch is a product that emits territorial messages mimicking natural pheromones. You can apply it on a scratching post to help encourage your cat to scratch where you want them too. Visit <https://www.feliway.com/us/Products/feliscratch-by-feliway> for more information and a tutorial on how it works.

Step 2: Cat Repellant Furniture

There are a couple of tricks to make your furniture unappealing to your cat so they learn to use the scratching post instead. You can spray pet-safe citrus scents on the couch, bath mat, or curtains the cat uses to scratch. Cats typically dislike the smell of citrus and may consequently avoid the area. You can continuously spray your furniture for about 2 weeks until your cat builds a negative association with it.

Double sided sticky tape is a great fix as well (like Sticky Paws). Place it on the sides of your couch, around or on the bath mat, on tables you don't want your cat jumping on, and more. Cats don't like sticky surfaces and they won't want to touch the areas with the tape. Once they have stopped scratching on those areas, you can remove the double-sided tape. Be sure to have some ready to replace in case the behavior comes back!

You can also protect your furniture in other ways, like removable couch or chair covers, or plastic furniture scratch guards. These are thin pieces of plastic that you can attach to your couch or chair arms that protect the upholstery from sharp little kitty nails.

The power of Enrichment and having Options

If your cat seems to be zooming around the home and knocking items down to their demise, environmental enrichment will help keep them busy. A cat in the wild spends time hunting for their next meal, but since cats at home don't necessarily need to hunt for food, they may display undesirable behavior as a result of boredom. Enrichment will give them an appropriate outlet to keep them both mentally and physically stimulated, which will likely help keep them out of trouble.

For more information on enrichment, please see our "**Environmental Enrichment**" flyer.

If they're climbing on top of areas you want to keep off-limit, like kitchen counters, consider adding a cat tree, shelves, or perches nearby designated specifically for cat surveying. It's a similar approach as with scratching – giving your cat an alternative area to explore and making the off-limit areas less attractive. This will allow your cat to still be a part of the action, but at a distance. Deter your cat from going on off-limit areas by using double-sided tape, adding citrus smells, or blocking those areas altogether while rewarding them with treats whenever they're using the preferred perching spots so they learn that these areas are actually more ideal (since they get goodies there).

It's all about compromise! Our cats should have the ability to be themselves, but it is important to give them the option to explore or scratch on preferable areas instead. Meeting your cat in the middle will ensure you and your feline friend are both happy.

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>