

How to Manage Your Cat's Claws

His Claws Are Your Cat's Greatest Tools

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The Importance of Your Cat's Claws

A kitten's paws are like the hands of babies. As they grow, they will become more and more important tools for life, and claws are an essential part of cats' paws. And like babies, they may use those tools in destructive ways unless they are trained. Please learn to respect your cat's claws. Never even consider declawing as an option, nor getting rid of the cat. Instead, consider the training options you need to use, even as you'd train an errant toddler.

The Many Uses of Cats' Claws

A cat's claws are versatile, multi-purpose tools. Cats use their retractable claws every day, for climbing, scratching, pouncing, turning, balancing, or defending themselves against other cats, dogs, other predators, even humans who might try to harm them. Cats do not scratch furniture with malicious intent. Scratching is part of their regular self-maintenance program to keep their claws nice and sharp for self defense. When cats scratch, they are actually dislodging and removing a transparent sheath that grows over the claws. You may occasionally find these sheaths buried in your carpet. Scratching also stretches and tones your cat's back and shoulder muscles. Yelling at your cat or getting mad at him only confuses him, because he is doing what comes naturally, with the nearest tool at hand, which may presently be your prized Louis XIV chair you inherited from Aunt Blanche.

A Two-Step Plan

Fortunately, there are compromises that offer you and Tiger a win-win resolution. An often-used psychological tool with children applies equally to our cats: encourage / reward desirable behavior and discourage undesirable behavior. **Consistency** and **repetition** are the key words and are crucial to any re-training program.

Positive Tips to Consider:

- **Apply soft plastic nail caps, such as Soft Claws**
Soft Claws (also sold under the name "Soft Paws") are the cat's meow when it comes to both fashion and utility. These plastic nailcaps come in four sizes, and application is fairly simple, once you and kitty get the hang of it. These are "natural" color, but they come in fashion colors as well. Available from your veterinarian or at the larger pet supply stores.
- **Trim Tiger's claws**
Trimming will not discourage him from clawing furniture, but will render his weapons a little less deadly. It's really very easy to do yourself, but if you're simply not up to the job, your veterinarian will do it for a minimal fee.
- **Buy or Build a Scratching Post**
Your cat should have at least one post that's tall enough for a full vertical scratch, sturdy enough to stand when he puts his full weight on it, and covered with a nice rough material like sisal.
 - Play with your cat near the post and put a little catnip on the post to make it more appealing.
 - Pretend you're a cat and scratch the post yourself; before you know it, kitty might join you.
 - Put scratching posts in places where your cat is likely to scratch: near where he sleeps and around exits and entries to rooms and the house.

Reward good behavior (this is important).

Praise your cat profusely and give him one of his favorite treats when he uses his scratching post, and when he has cooperated with claw trimming or Soft Claw application. His fertile little mind will soon associate loving hugs and tasty treats with good behavior.

Discourage Undesirable Behavior

You must use your discouragement tools at the time of the crime. If you delay even a few minutes, your cat will not understand why he is being rebuked and the lesson will have been lost. Never, **never** use physical punishment like hitting or shaking your cat. That only teaches him that you are a bigger bully, and can lead to even worse behavior on his part in the future.

- Use the "pennies in a can" trick. The instant you see kitty scratching the sofa, shake the can a few times. They hate the racket and will usually stop.
- Spray the area around your cat's favorite scratching area with citrus-scented spray. (Test fabric in an inconspicuous area first.)
- Lay a few sheets of aluminum foil over sofa arms and sides. Cats will usually avoid the area.
- Try putting wide double-sided tape over his favorite scratching surface. Cats dislike the sticky feeling and will avoid the area. A commercially available product is Sticky Paws.
- Buy a small plant mister spray bottle and fill it with water. When you catch your cat in the act, give him a spray with the bottle. Don't drench him; a quick spray will suffice.
- Consider a Commercial Cat Deterrent. These products often work with a combination of an electric eye or motion sensor, and a blast of air accompanied by a loud sound. If you have fearful and/or anxious cats in your home, I would advise these only be used as a last resort.

Tricks like penny cans and spray bottles are only effective as long as the cat does not associate you with the punishment. Otherwise, they will only continue their illegal scratching when you are absent. Often, once a cat has learned that certain areas are off-limits for scratching, clapping your hands, accompanied by a sharp "No" will be all you'll need.