

It is important to remember that scratching is a normal cat behaviour. And that there are three main reasons why a cat will scratch.

1. To sharpen their claws. The act of dragging their claws downwards (either horizontally or vertically) loosens and removes the outer husk revealing a sharp surface underneath. Often more of a plucking motion with their claws.
2. To exercise their forelimbs keeping them in prime hunting condition. This is often done by lying down and pulling their bodyweight along the floor. A cat will therefore choose a fixed and non-yielding surface to do this.
3. Probably the most complex is that scratching is a form of territorial communication or marking behaviour. When claws are scraped along a surface, scent glands in-between a cats' paw pads leave a smell along with the visual scratch marks and discarded claw husks, providing a strong message to other cats.

Cats can increase their scratching as a marking behaviour when in times of stress. However, it is important to rule out an underlying cause of stress by seeking veterinary advice first.



Why do cats like to scratch things?



Many cats like to scratch vertically however, some prefer to scratch horizontally on surfaces such as carpets, mats and stairs. If your cat is scratching furniture or carpets it is important to ensure alternative scratching areas are offered that provide the same opportunity. As an example, if your cat scratches the bottom step of your staircase, lying down to scratch horizontally, then a breeze block covered in carpet can easily replicate this and be located nearby. There are also many shop-bought alternatives for horizontal scratching such as cardboard or mat like scratchers.

Providing appropriate scratching areas for your cat may help save furniture and carpets. Scratching posts need to allow your cat to scratch at full stretch so a suggested height of post would be at least 60cm. They need to be sturdy enough to resist scratching and most importantly placed in an area your cat frequents on a regular basis.

Cats often scratch when they wake so a scratching post where they sleep the most can be useful. Some cats will scratch near entry and exit points, such as door mats or wooden frames, so scratching areas near to doorways or by a cat flap can be beneficial.

It is worth noting that cats don't scratch wallpaper or furnishings to get revenge on their owners. In fact, textured wallpaper is especially irresistible to a cat as it meets their needs. This is why it is important not to tell a cat off for scratching, however frustrating this may be, as it does not stop the behaviour and could make the cat feel anxious leading to other unwanted behaviours. In order to stop unwanted scratching, you need to provide your cat with a suitable alternative. A common example is that often an adult cat will still have the short kitten scratching post from when they were small, this is no longer suitable for their needs now that they are a fully-grown adult. Place a scratching post next to the area the cat is scratching, such as the sofa. To make the sofa seem unappealing you can cover the area being scratched in something sticky or shiny, such as a black bin liner or tin foil (always patch test an area first to ensure it doesn't do any damage to your furniture).

If your cat is scratching in widespread locations around the home it is likely they are signalling a general sense of insecurity. Synthetic feline pheromones such as Feliway, that mimic naturally occurring secretions from glands in a cats' cheeks, can be used to increase the feeling of security. Research has shown that cats will not scratch in areas where the pheromone is deposited (so it is best not to spray scratching posts with these products) so can be used as a deterrent once suitable scratching alternatives have been provided.

You can try and encourage your cat to use a scratching post by using catnip or cat mint on the post. Playing around the post with a fishing rod toy can encourage your cat to use the post. Avoid the temptation to lift up the cats' legs and scratch the post with their paws, this can be off-putting for your cat and may prevent them using the post altogether as it is providing a negative association.

