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Clawing

Feline Behavior Series

You need to start on this project by getting your cat a good scratching post or cat tree. (See Chapter 6 for information on these items.) A cat tree or post must be stable enough for your cat to climb and pull on, covered with material your cat can dig her claws into, and put in a prominent area so that your cat uses it.

After you've got the post or tree on place, encourage your cat to use it by teasing her with a cat toy and praising her for digging in her claws. If your cat enjoys catnip, rub some on the post to encourage her to spend more time there and give her treats for being on the tree as well. Make sure that she knows in no uncertain terms that climbing and clawing are perfectly fine and encouraged on her scratching post or cat tree. Don't put her paws on the post, however - cat's don't like to be "forced" to do anything!

Make sure that the post you choose isn't covered in the same texture of carpet as that in your house or your cat may have a hard time making the distinction between why clawing carpet on the post is okay but not on the floor. Better yet: Choose a post or tree covered with sisal, a rough-textured rope material cats love to dig into. Make the areas you don't want your pet to touch less appealing during the retraining process by covering them with foil, plastic sheeting, or plastic carpet runners with the pointy side out. Use double-sided tape generously as well - cats hate the feel of sticky stuff under their paws. You can still use the furniture yourself by applying the foil, plastic, or what-have-you to pieces of cardboard that you can lift off if you want to sit down.

Since clawing is also a territory-marker, move the cat tree into a prominent place, near that clawed corner of the couch in the center of the room, now covered with deterrents. Praise your cat for using the post instead. Move the post slowly - a few inches a day - to a place more to your taste.

If you catch your cat clawing, squirt with a spray bottle or use another distracting device. Try to stay out of sight whenever you do so and don't lose your temper. Remember: The idea is to get the cat to believe that the furniture itself is doing the disciplining. ("Wow, I put my claws in there and got water on me!")

Yes, your house is going to look pretty ugly for a while, with cat-deterrents all over the furniture and a cat tree in the middle of the room. You must live with it until your cat's new pattern of clawing only where acceptable is established. If you're patient and consistent, that new pattern will eventually take root.

For some cats, nail tips help with clawing problems. Glued onto the nails every six weeks or so, these Soft Paws tips even come in a variety of colors.

Keeping your cat's nails trimmed is another way to reduce his destructive capabilities. For instructions on how to do this task safely for your both, see Chapter 7 of the book *Cats for Dummies*.

You can get your own copy of *Cats for Dummies* right here at VeterinaryPartner.com! Just email Tamara@vin.com.

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We look forward to working with you and your pets to help you provide a healthy lifestyle for your companion pet.

Sincerely,
Yosemite Pet Hospital, Inc.

Sheila Langrock, DVM