

# Household Destruction

Shredded couches, frayed rugs, and scarred coffee tables. They're in the nightmares of every cat owner, but they don't have to be. Don't get me wrong – your cat needs to scratch things. It's a stress relief for them, and the stretching action can even prevent arthritis as they age; however there are ways to allow – even encourage – the benefits of scratching without sacrificing your home.

For starters, make sure your cat has several places that he can stretch and scratch at appropriately. His desire to do so will be strongest after he's eaten and after he's gone to the bathroom, so a smart idea would be to set up scratch-safe zones near his food bowl and near his litter boxes. Pick a scratching-surface he likes, and make sure it's large enough for him to stretch out fully.

But how do you know what surface he likes? Well, he'll tell you, of course! Watch him as he moves around your house. What interests him the most when he's rubbing his face on things, or stretching his shoulders and feet? Is it your rug, a fabric couch, or your wooden end table? Get a scratching post that most closely matches the material he's attracted to; rubbing on your cushy sofa says he likes soft surfaces like cardboard or carpet, extra attention to your dining room set tells you he wants a more solid scratcher, like rope or wood. If he's scratching at the floor, get a horizontal scratching pad. A cat who stands up and scratches your couch or door frames wants a vertical scratching post – and make sure it's tall enough that he can fully extend! Add catnip, either rubbing the leaves directly on his scratcher, or spritzing it with a catnip tea. Give him a treat each time you see him sniffing at, rubbing against, or scratching on his zone, and praise him gently and quietly when he's scratching appropriately.

While you're making the places you want him to scratch extra enticing, there are a few things you can do to remove temptation from inappropriate areas in the house. Cats usually don't like citrus scents, so furniture-safe spray that smells like orange, lemon, or grapefruit will brighten your mood while turning kitty off to your expensive couch. Make it even less appealing by using double stick tape, tin foil, or other coverings to protect your valuables when you can't be there. Resist the desire to yell, squirt water, or punish in any other way – remember what I said about scratching being a stress-relieving behavior? Scaring or upsetting your cat only causes more stress, and will only worsen the problem!

You can also get right to the point by purchasing a product called Soft Paws or Soft Claws. These are small, rubber tips that give your kitty's nails a gently rounded end, rather than a sharp, damaging point. A pack usually costs less than \$20, will last you several months, and can be applied right at home (though, of course, if you're more comfortable, your vet would be happy to help you with applications!) You can even get them in a rainbow of colors from normal cat claw white to multi-colored.



*\*If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Behavior and Training Department by phone: 410-235-8826 Ext. 151 or by email: [trainer@mdspca.org](mailto:trainer@mdspca.org)*