



PAWS WITH CLAWS

You have chosen to include in your family a wonderful friend and companion, the cat. Now, you must accept the fact that a cat has an innate need to use her claws to scratch. A cat will scratch for three reasons: to hone or sharpen her claws, for these have always been her chief offensive and defensive weapons; to stretch and tone her muscles; and to mark her territory.

Scratching Posts/Pads- You cannot eliminate the need a cat has for scratching. But you can teach a cat to scratch in an appropriate place.

Scratching posts are good for this as are scratching materials hung from doorknobs, attached to walls, or lying flat on the floor. Posts are usually carpeted or wrapped with sisal rope. Flat scratching pads can be corrugated cardboard, carpeted, or covered with burlap or upholstery material. Some people have had success by bringing an alder wood log into the house!

Training sometimes requires more than one post. A scratching post should be placed close to where your cat usually sleeps, eats, or waits to go outside. Upon awakening, or after eating, a cat will usually place her front paws on something above her head, then extend her claws and pull like crazy. A scratching post should also be sturdy enough so as not to fall over while your cat scratching. Carefully select the material on a scratching post. The fabric should not be a kind that makes it difficult for your cat to extract her claws.

Teaching your cat to use a scratching post or hanging scratching material can be accomplished in several ways. First of all, be sure to praise your cat every time you see her using her scratching post. A happy, "Good Kitty!" followed by a favorite food treat will reinforce this behavior. Drag a catnip mouse or a piece of paper tied to a string, across the floor and let her "crawl" up the scratching post. If she is scratching in an inappropriate place, gently lift her up, place her next to the scratching post and praise her if she uses it. Try sprinkling some catnip on the scratching post. This will have more effect on adult cats. Purchase a carpeted kitty condo in which your cat can sleep, wake up, stretch, and SCRATCH, too.

Most of all, do not punish your kitty for scratching the furniture by hitting, scolding or chasing her. Your cat will not understand all of the fuss over doing what comes naturally. Punishment will only build stress and create a fearful cat that may socially withdraw or become aggressive towards you. The best thing is to have several places where kitty may scratch, especially close to sleeping areas and doors. Taping foil or plastic over the already inappropriately scratched area will discourage further scratching. Also, taping a tightly blown up balloon on the scratched furniture will negatively reinforce this as a scratching area if by chance she pops the balloon. You may want to use one of the new electronic devices that emit a high-pitched alarm whenever kitty approaches an off-limits scratching place. You can also use a squirt bottle filled with water to deter kitty from scratching inappropriately.

Trimming Claws- As an alternative to declawing and to help stem the destruction from scratching, many cat owners keep their cats' claws trimmed. This is easiest if you start from the beginning when your cat is a kitten, although most cats can be persuaded to accept this procedure. Use nail clippers available at pet stores. Look for the guillotine type (don't use the human variety, this will crush and injure your cat's claw) and get blade replacements as the sharper the blade is, the easier it is to trim the claws. There are also clippers that look like scissors with short, hooked blades. These may be easier for some people to handle.

Set your cat down securely in the crook of your "off" arm, with the cat either in your lap or on the floor between your knees, depending on the size of your cat and your own size. Pin the cat to your

side with your arm and hold one of its paws with your hand (this is sometimes a little much for an "off" arm, you may wish to practice). With its back away from you, it cannot scratch you, or easily get away. With your "good" hand, hold the clippers. If you squeeze your cat's paw with your off hand, the claws will come out. Examine them carefully (you may want to do this part before actually trying to trim them, to familiarize yourself with how the claws look). If the claws are white (most cat's are), the difference between the nail and the quick is easy to see (use good lighting). The quick will be the pink tissue visible within the nail of the claw at the base. This is comparable to the difference between the nail attached to your skin and the part that grows beyond it. **DO NOT CUT BELOW THE QUICK.** It will be painful to your cat and bleed everywhere. When in doubt, trim less of the nail. It will just mean trimming more often. Clip the portion above the quick for each nail and don't forget the dewclaws. On cats, dewclaws are found only on the front paws, about where humans would have their thumbs -- they do not touch the ground. Some cats are polydactyl, and have up to seven claws on any paw. Normally there are four claws per paw, with one dewclaw on each of the front paws. Rear claws don't need to be trimmed as often or at all; they do not grow as quickly and are not as sharp. You should be able to hold any of the four paws with your off hand; it will become easier with practice.

If you have too much trouble holding the cat still for this, enlist someone else to help. Be careful as this position often means you are in front of its claws and a potential target for scratching. Older cats generally object more than younger ones. Therefore, you should start this procedure as soon as you get your cat if you intend to trim the claws yourself.

Trimming claws should be done weekly. Different claws grow at different rates, so check them periodically. Use the same position you use for clipping. It gives you extra practice and reduces the cat's anxiety at being in that position. Unlike human nails, to stay sharp, claws must shed outer layers of nail. Cats will pull on their claws or scratch to remove these layers. This is perfectly normal and is comparable to humans cutting and filing their own nails. You may see slices of claws lying around, especially on scratching posts. This is also quite normal.

Soft Paws- If all of this is too time consuming and you have a strictly indoor cat, you have another very desirable option; a wonderful product called Soft Paws®. These are lightweight vinyl caps that you apply over your cat's own claws. They have rounded edges, so your cat's scratching doesn't damage your home and furnishings. Soft Paws® are great for households with small children, as they guard against the child getting scratched. They are also extremely useful for people who are away from home all day and simply can't apply the watchfulness necessary to train a cat to use a scratching post. A kit lasts approximately six weeks once Kitty becomes accustomed to them. At first they may feel a bit strange to her and she may groom them excessively, causing them to come off sooner. She'll get used to them quickly though, and thereafter they will last longer.

Soft Paws® come in a kit and are easy to apply with the adhesive provided. They are generally applied to the front paws only, since these are what cause most of the destruction to your home. A kit will last approximately three to six months, depending on your cat. After applying the Soft Paws®, check Kitty's claws weekly. You may find one or two caps missing from time to time, and these are easily replaced using the adhesive included in the kit.