



Destructive Behavior: Scratching Objects- Deterrents and Retraining

Deterring Scratching:

The best deterrents are those that will make the object undesirable and does not require your presence to be effective. Methods such as squirting your cat with a water bottle are often ineffective in deterring the unwanted behavior but very successful in having your cat associate you with the negative feeling of being sprayed.

While there are products available in most pet stores available to help deter your cat from certain areas or objects, there are similar products available that aren't marketed towards pet owners. Products such as plastic carpet protectors can be just as effective as training mats (such as x-mats) and are typically more widely available and often cheaper.

Vertical Scratching:

With curtains, double sided tape or Sticky Paws works well. Cats typically do not like the sticky texture and it is light weight enough that it can be applied to the fabric. Sticky Paws are made not to leave residue on fabrics, however you should always check. Double sided tape and adhesive shelf liner are other alternatives. Place the tape from as high as your cat can reach to the bottom, an x-pattern works best at covering the majority of surface. Avoid any deterrent sprays, as this might inadvertently keep your cat from using the scratcher due to proximity to the smell.

For couches, it is important to understand that he is often marking the area to announce he is a part of the family. This is where you spend a lot of time, he wants to be near you and let everyone else know that you are his. Keep that in mind when picking out a scratcher! A cat tree placed next to or behind the sofa with a scratching post base will allow him to feel a part of the activity, allow him to supervise and also provide the proper place to scratch.

If your cat is scratching the sides or back of the sofa, taking a plastic carpet runner/protector and attaching it with the nubby side out is one option. The nubby texture is unappealing for cats as it is not very comfortable on their paws. If you cannot use the carpet runner, Sticky Paws, double sided tape or adhesive shelf liner are other solutions. Sticky Paws and shelf liners are available in a multitude of sizes which makes for easy application to a large surface.

If you believe your cat is scratching the couch due to texture (a tightly woven material is preferred by many cats) try covering the couch with a bed sheet, think slick and smooth texture. You must tightly tuck the sheet over the couch and tape it around the legs so your cat cannot get underneath the sheet and scratch the couch.

Horizontal Scratching:

A large part of horizontal scratching is location. Where in particular is your cat scratching? There may be multiple places, but if you look at the floor plan of your home and take a close look at where he is scratching, you will notice a pattern. This is important because it will give you insight into why your cat is scratching in the particular area.



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If your cat is scratching the carpet/rug next to the front door when you get home, he is likely extremely excited for your return and trying to release his excitement and energy. Try placing your scratcher near the door and using either the upside down carpet runner or one of the sticky methods over the carpet/rug.

A wedge shaped scratcher can help if you notice multiple horizontal places have been scratched. There may have been a time where your cats nails were caught in the carpeting/rug and he decided it was a pretty nice texture to scratch on. It's important that you keep your cats nails trimmed regularly and the material of the scratcher is not the same as your carpet/rug, it will just confuse him.

Retraining:

Retraining? This implies some sort of training. With a cat. This isn't as daunting as it sounds. Retraining your cat to use his scratching post requires you to make your cats new scratching area so amazing he cannot resist it. Some cats may immediately take to a new scratcher once they investigate it and realize it is their preferred texture. However, some need a little coaxing.

Scent: Some scratchers come with catnip inside and you can take it to the next level by rubbing some catnip onto the surface. You can also take something that contains the scent of your cat, such as a blanket or cloth you've rubbed along his cheeks, and rub that on the surface. Cats use facial marking to reaffirm they are in familiar surroundings and things are ok, this method will help him accept the new scratcher.

Sound: To many cats, the sound of scratching triggers the desire to do the same. When your cat is nearby, run your fingers along the scratcher to create a sound similar to that of his own scratching would make.

Play: Using a fishing pole/wand type of toy can quickly show your cat how amazing his new scratcher is. Start an interactive play session, moving the toy as prey, and have him 'catch' the toy on the scratcher. When he pounces on it to catch his prey, he will realize what a great scratching surface he has stumbled upon. The more enjoyable it is for him to sink his claws into, the better.

Removing the Deterrents:

Do not rush to remove the deterrents at the first sight of success! In retraining, there may be slip ups down the line so it is crucial that you keep the deterrents up until you have established a new pattern of regularly using the scratcher. If you had to use multiple deterrents, gradually phase them out one by one.

Do not remove your cats old and run down scratcher as soon as you get him a new one. The old one, while likely ineffective for conditioning, still is important as it contains his scent and his marks. Give it time, and once you are sure that your cat has accepted his new scratcher, then you can remove the old.