

Teaching Your Cat to Use a Scratching Post

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Cats scratch on things for two reasons: to shed their claws and to mark their territory. To save your furniture from damage, you should provide your cat with a scratching post or two and teach him/her how to use it. The requirements for a good scratching post are:

- Vertical posts must be sturdy and tall enough for the cat to stretch its body. Horizontal marking posts are preferred by some cats. Try both types to find out what your cat prefers, or offer one of each.
- The posts should be located in prominent areas in your home, not in the basement. Cats often scratch when they wake up from a nap so put one near the cat's sleeping area.
- You can buy ready-made scratching posts at the pet store or you can make your own. A simple log is preferred by some cats. For others, a piece of corrugated cardboard mounted on a piece of wood works just fine. Although most pre-made posts are covered with carpet, this may not be the best material to use. Cats can get their claws stuck in the fabric loops and stop using the post as a result. Try attaching the carpet upside down or using other materials like upholstery fabric that are more "shreddable."
- Attract your cat to the post using catnip. Sprinkle the catnip on the base and into the fabric or hang bags of catnip from the top. Spend time near the post encouraging your cat to interact with it. Play with the cat near the post and incorporate it into your play.
- The most important step is to reward the cat every time he/she uses the post. Have yummy food treats nearby and give one to the cat whenever you see him/her scratching the post.
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Once your cat is using the scratching post you have provided, you can teach him/her that other things are off limits. If you catch your cat scratching the sofa or chair, make a loud noise to startle the cat or squirt him/her with a plant sprayer or squirt gun. It is important that the cat thinks the noise or water came out of nowhere. This way he/she will associate the bad thing with the behavior of scratching on the chair, not with you. It's important to entice the cat to the scratching post and praise him/her for using it.