BEHAVIOR

How to Stop a Cat Scratching Furniture, Humanely

Scratching is normal and necessary. Why cats scratch, the post a cat will actually use and where to put it, how to move it off the sofa without punishment, nail care, and why vets oppose declawing, which New York bans.

By Catt County Cat Nippers • Reviewed October 28, 2026 • 5 min read • 6 cited sources

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The short answer

You can't stop a cat scratching, and you shouldn't try: scratching is normal and necessary. What you can change is where it scratches. Give it a sturdy post taller than its body, covered in a surface it likes, right next to the furniture it scratches now and near where it sleeps.

Make the furniture less appealing for a while with a cover or double-sided tape, and reward the cat within seconds every time it uses the post. Keep its nails trimmed. Declawing is not the answer: it is an amputation, and New York bans it except for medical reasons.

AT A GLANCE

- Never punish scratching. It is normal behavior: praise or reward the cat when it uses the post instead.
- Trim nails regularly.

Why cats scratch

Scratching is normal behavior, not a medical problem. It leaves scent from glands in the paws, removes the old outer layer of the claws, and stretches the muscles of the back and legs.

It is also a message: scratching marks territory, by sight and by scent, for other cats and animals. The Feline Veterinary Medical Association (FelineVMA, formerly the American Association of Feline Practitioners) notes that cats scratch to communicate, often more in times of stress or anxiety. Many cats scratch as soon as they wake up, as part of a good stretch.

Choose the right post

- Sturdy: it must not wobble or tip over.
- Tall: taller than your cat's body, so it can scratch at a full stretch.
- The right angle: most cats like to scratch upright, but a cat that scratches the carpet may prefer a flat pad. Watch your cat: some prefer vertical posts, others horizontal pads. Match what they already scratch.
- The right surface: rough materials such as sisal rope are popular. Others prefer corrugated cardboard, carpet or wood.
- More than one: put posts or pads in several places, so there is always one nearby.

Put it in the right place

- Place a post right beside the furniture the cat already scratches, and in areas where the cat rests and spends time.
- Put one near where it sleeps, to catch the stretch when it wakes up.
- Scratching by a door to the outside or a window? Put a post there. If your cat can see or smell other cats through it, block the view, and ask your vet about synthetic feline facial pheromones.

Fixes for common problems

IF YOUR CAT SCRATCHES THE WRONG THING

If your cat…	Try
Scratches the arm or back of the sofa	A tall, sturdy post right in front of it, and a cover or double-sided tape on the sofa for now
Scratches the carpet or a rug	A flat cardboard or sisal pad on that spot
Scratches by a door or window	A post there; if it can see other cats outside, block the view

If your cat…	Try
`Ignores the new post`	Move it next to the spot it scratches, try a different surface, and reward any use within 3 seconds
`Grabs hands and feet in play`	Play with a wand toy instead, and never use fingers or toes as toys

From the FelineVMA's Cat Friendly Homes advice on living with a clawed cat.

This quick sheet is the start of the guide. Still to read: Move the cat off the furniture, kindly, Nail care, Why vets oppose declawing and 2 more sections, plus the Indoor Cat Enrichment Chart. Read it all free when you join our pet health emails at cattcountycatnippers.org/articles/solving-inappropriate-scratching-cat-training-guide

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