

Pedicure for Kitty

Why does my cat like to scratch?

All felines like to stretch and scratch. This action not only removes old claw sheaths, but enables them to mark their territory with scent glands in their paws when they scratch. Some cats prefer to scratch vertically and some horizontally. Sometimes they do it for pure exercise. When directed towards furniture, this behavior often upsets cat guardians and they sometimes turn to declawing their kitty, which not only robs a cat of its only means of defense, but is a cruel and painful disfigurement (akin to having your own nails surgically removed at the knuckles). In fact, few veterinarians provide this service anymore. Cats that are declawed frequently develop behavioral problems such as biting and may stop using the litter box because their paws become arthritic and hurt. Some cat experts believe that cats may have phantom pain after the amputation, just as people who have lost limbs have phantom pain.

The best and most humane alternative to dealing with inappropriate cat scratching is providing appropriate scratchers, rewarding your cat for using them and nail-clipping.

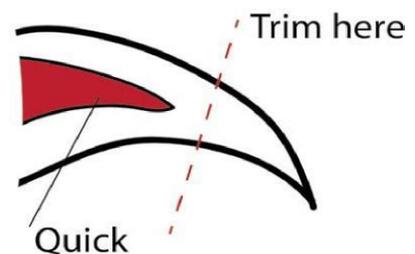
Scratching Posts: There are a vast array of scratching posts—ones that hang from a doorknob or stand upright, pricey multi-floor condos and less expensive flat, cardboard ones. Your cat will tell you which one she likes. Most cats prefer sturdy scratchers that don't move. Cats who are vertical scratchers like a post that is taller than they are when they stand up and stretch. Many vertical scratchers are simply too short to be attractive for a whole body stretch and scratch. This is why many couches and chairs become the favorite place for scratching. Having several scratchers near your cat's favorite sleeping places will help deter them from using the furniture. Dragging a toy or rubbing catnip over it may also attract a cat's attention. (Kittens don't respond to cat nip.) Rewarding a cat for using the scratching post will help increase the likelihood of it being used.

Products to lure cats off furniture can be used. Spraying "Feliway" on furniture and rugs will decrease their use for scratching. Eventually your cat will get in the habit of using the scratchers you have provided. Products such as "Sticky Paws" can be used harmlessly on furniture.

How do I trim my cat's nails?

Nail Trimming: Keeping your cat's claws short will not only help protect your furniture, but will be much more pleasant for you when your kitty kneads you to show how much he loves you. With older or overweight cats, nail trimming can be particularly important as the claws can curve inward and create a painful step as well as infection.

To view nail clipping, Dr. Christianne Schelling has a good video with a fairly mellow, tolerant cat: [Nail Trimming Video](#). Initially your goal should be to cut a few nails successfully, don't aim for all 18 in one session. Cutting a few nails each day will allow your cat to think of this as treat time. If your cat has never had his nails cut, you can start by just gently massaging his paws and reward him for letting you do this.



Before beginning, pull out everything you will need—nail clippers, Styptic powder or pencil in case you cut too close to the “quick” and kitty treats for a reward afterward. Then, when your cat is mellow or just waking up from a nap take the following steps.

1. Hold him on your lap with his body against you so he feels secure and you can prevent him from escaping. You can also put him on a counter surface that is slippery enough to make it hard for him to gain traction and jump off.
2. With nail clippers in one hand and holding the paw in the other, gently push on the paw-pad so the nails pop out.
3. Gently cut at an angle, avoiding the pink “quick” at the base of the claw. Cats have five claws in the front and four in the back. It may take a little exploration—especially if you have a longhaired, fuzzy feline—to find the “dew claw” on the inside of the front paw.
4. Back claws often don't get as long as the front because cats push off with the back paws and groom them with their teeth. But trim those too.
5. And, surprise! You may have a polydactyl cat with an extra “toe.” Check those mittens!
6. Stop cutting before your cat has had enough and provide a very yummy treat!



A Two Person Job: Wiggly kittens or less tolerant cats may need two people for the clipping—one to scruff the cat, the other to clip the claws. Scruffing a cat might feel strange to you but most cats don't mind it. A primal kinesthetic memory from when their mom carried them around in her mouth, most cats respond to it instantly and immediately relax. One person can scruff and hold the cat facing outward as the other person clips.

Last but not least, if these techniques are too troublesome or overwhelming, your vet or animal grooming center will be happy to clip your cat's claws for a small fee.

Behavior Resources:

Marin Humane's [Behavior & Training](#) department conducts various cat workshops. Sign up on our [Cat Behavior](#) (MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/cats) page for the next available class series. We also have **Cat Behavior Consultants** who are available for private training or consultations (on-site or in-home) at 415.506.6284 or CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org.

More information about cat behavior is available by clicking [here](#) or on our website at MarinHumane.org/oh-behave/handouts.