

**DECLAWING CATS:
MANICURE OR MORE?**

Cats' claws and the bones and cartilage that hold them in place allow cats to balance properly, climb and defend themselves.

Declawing - which removes the entire first joint on each toe, claws, bones, and cartilage - is a painful and permanent procedure.

Cats often have their balance impaired by the procedure and, as a result, declawed cats have to relearn to walk, much as a person would after losing his or her toes.

Without claws, even house-trained cats may urinate and defecate outside the litter box in an attempt to mark their territory. Declawed cats may be morose, reclusive and withdrawn, or irritable, aggressive, and unpredictable.

Many people think that declawed cats are safer around babies, but in fact, the lack of claws, a cat's first line of defense, makes many cats feel so insecure that they tend to bite more often as a means of self-protection.

Nearly two dozen countries (including England, Australia, and Japan) ban or severely restrict declawing surgeries.

Declawing shouldn't be performed without careful deliberation and after all other options to deal with inappropriate scratching have been exhausted.

There are effective and humane alternatives to declawing that can prevent cats from inflicting damage with their claws.



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FACTS ABOUT CATS & DECLAWING



Cats claw to have fun and exercise, to maintain the condition of their nails, and to mark their territory-visually and with scent.

They stretch by digging their claws in and pulling against their own claw-hold. Cats' natural instinct to scratch serves both their physical and psychological needs. Before domestication, cats satisfied these needs by clawing tree trunks. Today, domesticated cats can be guided to satisfy their desire to claw without damaging valuable property.

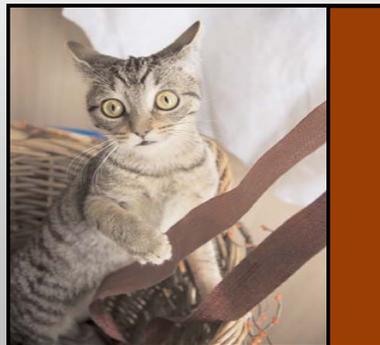
Compassionate Alternatives

With a little effort and patience, you can protect your furnishings and preserve your cat's claws at the same time. The following hints will help:

- Trim your cat's nails regularly. When the cat is relaxed and unafraid, gently press on the toes until the claws extend. Use a pair of nail clippers and cut only the tip of the nail, taking care not to damage the vein or "quick." The nail hook is what tears upholstery, so removing it virtually eliminates damage.
- Buy or build two or more scratching posts. They must be sturdy, tall enough to allow the cat to stretch (three feet or taller), and properly placed. Bark-covered logs, posts covered with sisal, or posts covered with tightly woven burlap work well. Soft, fluffy, carpeted scratching posts don't work—they are one of the most common reasons why people declaw their cats—most cats don't like these posts and frustrated human companions end up resorting to surgery.

If you use carpet, secure it to the posts with the rough backing on the outside; soft carpeting will not satisfy most cats' need to claw. Place one scratching post where your cat is already clawing and another near the area where he or she normally sleeps (cats like to stretch and scratch when they first wake up). Many people make the mistake of putting the scratching post in an out-of-the-way location because they don't like the appearance of it, but this only discourages the cat from using the post in favour of a more accessible object.

- Consider cardboard or sisal "scratching boxes" that lie flat on the floor. These are inexpensive and small enough to scatter around the house, allowing your cat easy access to an "approved" scratching spot at all times. They do wear out fairly quickly, however, and will need to be replaced every few months otherwise cats may get frustrated and revert to using furniture.
- Teach your cat where to claw and where not to claw. Place your cat on the new scratching post and move his or her paws, or pretend to scratch it yourself. This will scent the posts and encourage exploratory clawing. Make the post a "fun" place to be. Play



games with your cat on and around the post and attach hanging strings, balls, and/or bouncy wire toys to it. Try sprinkling catnip on the post, too (a once-a-week or so refresher application will keep your cat interested). When kitty uses the post, reinforce this behavior with praise, but be careful not to startle or frighten him or her. When your cat claws furniture, dis-

courage this behavior with a firm voice or other loud noise, but never with physical force. Directing lukewarm water from a squirt gun at the animal's back is often successful. During the training period, you may need to cover upholstery with plastic or other protection (cats don't like the slippery feel and will quickly learn to stay away).

- Strategically placed double-sided tape, such as Paws Off, also discourages the clawing of furniture and upholstery.
- A product called Soft Paws is also available. Soft Paws prevents the use of a cat's claws on a temporary basis. Soft Paws are vinyl nail caps that are glued on to your cat's existing nails. Once the nail caps are applied they remain in place for approximately 4-6 weeks and fall off with the natural growth of the cat's nails.