

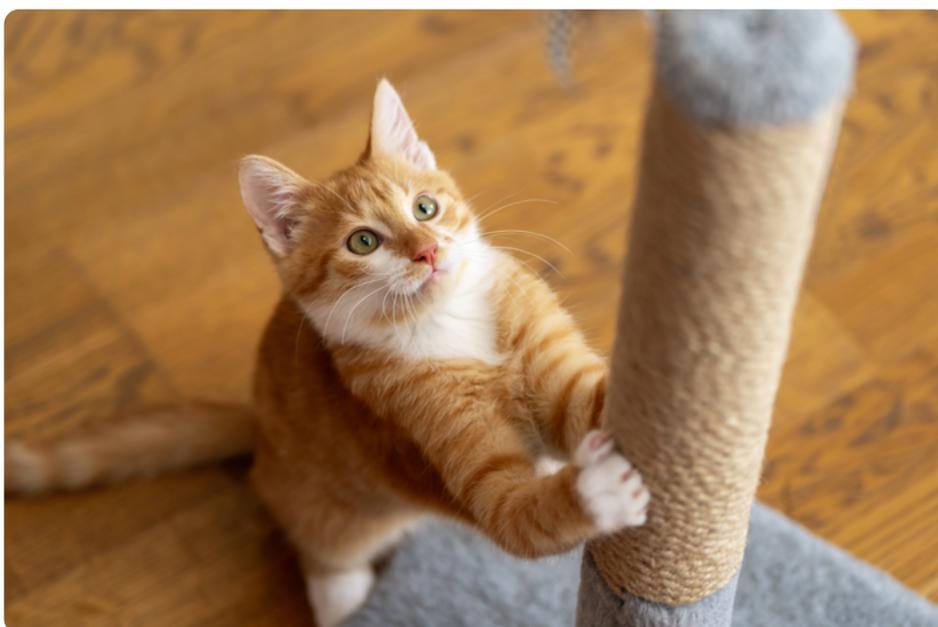
# Feline: Scratching behaviours

Scratching is a normal behaviour for cats and has several important purposes. It allows them to maintain their nail health, stretch their muscles, as well as leave visual and chemical messages in their environment. When they scratch, they leave a physical mark and deposit pheromones from the scent glands in their paws. These visual and chemical messages allow cats to communicate with one another without being in proximity and provides cats with familiarity within their environment which helps them feel secure.

It is essential that every cat has access to appropriate scratching facilities. If these are not desirable to your cat or placed in an unsuitable location, they will instinctually find another alternative, such as household furniture items. Therefore, it is essential to consider the information below when providing scratching items for your cat.

## What makes a scratching item desirable?

- ① Cats prefer cat posts/trees that do not wobble when they lean their body weight against it to scratch. Look for items with a wide, sturdy base.
- ② All scratching items should be large and tall enough for your cat to complete a full body stretch.
- ③ Some cats prefer to scratch vertical objects, while others prefer horizontal items. It is best to provide both.
- ④ Some cats may prefer a specific material such as sisal rope, carpet or cardboard. It is best to provide many different options.



## Product suggestions



①

**Kitty Scratch & Sleep Post by Kazoo**



②

**Aslan Cat Scratcher by Purrfect Pet Products**



③

**2 Chamber Cat Scratch Den by Kazoo**



④

**Cat Scratcher Wave by Kmart**

- ① Invest in a good quality, sturdy sisal rope cat tree that doubles as a resting area and a comfortable vantage point. In multi-cat households, multiple cat trees are essential, as they increase available space in the home and can greatly reduce conflict. They also allow cats to cope with challenging situations more effectively by providing them with a safe place to retreat, away from children, other pets, or stressors in the home.
- ② This sturdy, tall item made from carpet allows cats to complete a full body stretch and easily access a comfortable vantage point.
- ③ This is a good-quality item made from sisal rope. It allows for both horizontal and vertical scratching, as well as a vantage point and two comfortable resting areas.
- ④ A horizontal item made of cardboard. All cats should have at least one of these. Great for senior cats or those with mobility issues.

## Does location matter? Where should I place the scratching items?

Yes, location matters. Place scratching items in common areas throughout the home where the cat likes to rest, play, and spend time with you. Often, this will be in prominent areas near couches and beds. It's also desirable to place some options near secure, sunny windows and entry/exit points to the home.

## Do I need to teach my cat how to use their scratching items?

Nope. Scratching is an instinctive behaviour. If you provide a variety of items that meet their needs, your cat will scratch it. However, you can encourage them to use the items by luring string toys up and around it, or you can rub the post with herbs such as catmint, dried catnip or silvervine powder – however, these plants only affect a portion of cats, and some cats will not respond to it. Each time your cat uses the post, reward them with praise and treats. Do **not** attempt to lift your cat's paws onto the scratcher as this aversive experience may lead to the cat avoiding the item in future.

## What if my cat starts to scratch items that I don't want them to scratch?

Never attempt to 'punish' your cat as this will damage your relationship with them, cause a lot of distress that will impact their welfare and could worsen, or lead to the development of other unwanted behaviours.

Firstly, consider what your cat might find appealing about that particular item. Think about the sturdiness, height, material, and location of the item that you don't want them to scratch and try and replicate that by providing a suitable alternative in a similar location. Using Feliway Classic spray on the item you **don't want** your cat to scratch may help. Stop spraying the item if they start to facial rub against it.

You can make furniture items unappealing to your cat by covering them with plastics, but you **must** address their need to scratch by providing other options. Some people are comfortable with placing items on furniture that prevent it from being damaged but still allow the cat to scratch.

### Examples:



Couch corner protector made of sisal rope



Cat-E-Corner by Hilde & Phil



Couch Guard made of natural sisal

### Support



- This information is only intended as a guide. If you have concerns, please contact our RSPCA NSW Behaviour Team [mail@rspcansw.org.au](mailto:mail@rspcansw.org.au) or a veterinary behaviourist.