

SCRATCH THAT!

Anyone who has owned a cat has probably had the experience of kitty clawing your nice couch or chair. Your immediate reaction is to punish the little critter somehow. That will only make it worse. After all kitty just knows that she likes to scratch that particular piece of furniture. She doesn't understand that you paid a lot of money for it and are quite proud of it.

I don't know if we are smarter than our cats but we are capable of learning how to work with them in positive ways. Cats need to scratch. It conditions their nails, it stretches and exercises their paws and it also marks their territory. Cats are territorial creatures, but then so are we - we have doors and gates and fences to mark our territory.

Outdoor cats have favorite scratching sites and will return to the same tree again and again. If your indoor cats' favorite scratching place is your couch or some other favorite property of yours you can change that. First move the couch a few feet from the spot where the kitty scratches, replace that with a scratching post (a post with different levels and ledges is best so she can climb up and lay down and play at different levels) in exactly the same spot where the cat has been scratching.

Now you must do two things. Teach kitty to use the new post and not to use the couch. Make the couch undesirable by covering the scratching area with something kitty doesn't like. Tinfoil will create a sound the cats doesn't like. Cheese cloth will cause kitty to snag her claws which she won't enjoy. You can also put an unpleasant scent (i.e. citrus or menthol) on a towel and drape it over the couch. This will repel kitty from going to the new spot where the couch is now located. Now you must make the new scratching post an attracting force. You are already taking advantage of the fact that the scratching post is in the same location where kitty liked to scratch. Don't force kitty by putting its paws on the post and making it scratch. Cats do not like being forced and it makes them resist and resent you.

Take a favorite toy and drag it on the end of a string over to the post. When kitty is really into playing with the toy drag it up the

post. As she swats and pounces on the toy she will figure out the the post is a fun thing to scratch. When she scratches, praise her and give her treats and let her know what a good kitty she is. If she likes catnip rub some on the scratching post. You can also put treats and toys at different levels on the scratching post to give kitty the experience of making the whole thing her territory and scratching the post as she climbs.

Once kitty is well established at using the new post begin very slowly by moving the scratching post a few inches toward the final location where you would like the scratching post to be located. Do not do this too quickly as you don't want her to lose the notion of territoriality. You are so slowly moving her territory that hopefully she won't notice and go along with it.

Last step move your couch back to where you want it.

Cheryl Wicks is the Co-Founder and President of Sammie's Friends