

Alternatives to Declawing your Cat

from BloomingPaws veterinarians

source: <http://www.bloomingpaws.net/learning-library/>

Declawing a cat is not the only way to stop it from damaging objects in your home. This article provides a number of other ways to approach this problem. One or more of these ideas could help your cat avoid declawing. The article also gives some basic information on feline behavior and on some aspects of their biology related to scratching.

Quit scratching my new couch!

- **Why do cats scratch?** Owners need to understand that scratching is a normal feline behavior. Cats scratch to groom their front claws, to maintain normal motion in their front paws, to stretch their bodies, and to mark their scent. Cats' nails grow in layers — as they scratch they are removing the outer layer as it grows. This exposes the new nail underneath. Another important point: Allowing your pets to express natural behaviors such as scratching will prevent stress, anxiety, and frustration which can lead to other behavioral or potential health problems.
- It is also important to know that kittens tend to scratch more than adult cats, and this is because they are just learning how to use their bodies and their claws. They need practice and training in order to understand what is the right behavior in their home environments as they grow into adults. Don't get too frustrated with your scratching kitten for this reason!

What is declawing?

- Declawing is a permanent way to remove your cat's front nails by removing the bone in the tip of their toes. This is the same bone we humans have at the tips of our fingers. This is essentially an orthopedic surgery which can

be painful, which is why we send your cat home with strong pain medication and why we keep them in the clinic longer to monitor them after this surgery.

- The hind claws are not routinely removed as this can be an excessively painful procedure, and usually your cat is not causing much damage with its hind claws.
- We recommend that you speak with your veterinarian to find out if declawing is right for your cat. There are a number of factors when considering this surgery, such as age, weight, lifestyle, etc. Before considering this procedure we recommend that you try the alternatives listed below.

Alternative options to declawing:

1. Scratching posts and pads

- Provide your cat with suitable scratchers where they can exhibit normal scratching behavior. Scratchers come in multiple styles and textures. It is important to experiment with a variety of textures and types of scratchers to determine which your cat prefers.
- There are many different scratching posts/pads available to purchase. It may be helpful to visit the following website to see some veterinarian-designed scratching posts and to get more information on scratching behaviors, etc. : www.purrfectpost.com.

2. Regular nail trims

- Ensuring you trim your cat's nails regularly will reduce any damage it could do to you or your furniture, but also allows your cat to get used to nail trims. Just like any new skill, it may take time for you and your pet to get the knack of nail trimming. Please see your veterinarian for a demonstration and further tips on nail trims at home.

- You can also check out the following website for step-by-step instructions (including good photos):

www.vetmed.wsu.edu/outreach/Pet-Health-Topics/categories/procedures/cats/clipping-your-cat's-claws.

3. Temporary synthetic nail caps

- Synthetic caps prevent damage to furniture and injury to owners while also allowing your cat to express his/her natural behavior.
- These caps are glued over your cat's nails every 4–6 weeks. They are safe to apply and easy to apply once you learn how. You can also bring your cat and your nail caps into BloomingPaws for the grooming department to place, and you can even ask for a demo so you can learn to do it at home!
- In some cats, the caps won't stay on as long as 4–6 weeks. The cat may chew off the caps, or, as the nails naturally grow, some may come off.
- Check out the Soft Paws website for more information:
www.softpaws.com.

4. Appropriate environmental enrichment

- Destructive behavior can occur when your cat's environmental needs have not been met.
- Each cat's needs may be slightly different, just like people! All resources need to be in a quiet area of the house to avoid your cat feeling threatened or stressed. These areas should have two entry/exits so your cat never feels trapped. See the list below for the basics required for a secure environment:
 - Food — Predictable meal times and individual food bowls for each cat.

- Water — Clean fresh water in a location that appeals to your cat.
- Toilet — A convenient, clean, private litter box serves for a kitty toilet. As a general rule of thumb, you should have one for each cat, plus one. Many cats prefer the litter box to be one and a half times the length of their body and at least one and a half inches deep.
- Safe Place to Sleep — Soft bedding, as well as familiar smells and sounds, supply security.
- Familiar Territory — Face rubbing and scratching surfaces mark the territory with a personal touch. Be sure to supply plenty of scratching posts.

5. Tape

Place double-sided sticky tape on the furniture where your cat is choosing to scratch. The sticky feeling may discourage your cat from scratching there.

I bought this amazing scratching post for my cat but he won't use it!

Try sprinkling catnip or spraying catnip spray onto the scratcher to boost your cat's interest and to encourage natural rubbing and scratching behaviors. You can also use a laser pointer to play with your cat on and around the scratcher to encourage their curiosity and comfort around the scratcher. You can try lifting up your cat when he/she is scratching your furniture and bring them over to the scratcher — this may help them get the idea!

***Please speak with the veterinary staff at BloomingPaws
for further information or questions!***