

# A Phased Approach to Clawing

The following checklist serves as the gold standard for managing feline scratching without surgical intervention. This approach should be implemented as soon as a kitten enters the home, or immediately upon the identification of a scratching problem in an adult cat.



## Phase 1: Provide Scratching Alternatives

- **Observe Current Targets:** Identify where the cat is scratching. Is it vertical (sofa arms) or horizontal (carpets)? Is it near the bed or the door?
- **Provide Material Variety:** Install at least one sisal post (vertical), one cardboard inclined scratcher, and one horizontal carpet mat.
- **Ensure Stability and Height:** Posts must be at least 3 feet tall for adult cats and weighted at the base to prevent movement.
- **Place Strategically:** Place appropriate scratchers directly adjacent to the places you do not want them to claw. Cats like to scratch immediately after waking, so place scratchers near rest areas as well as in high-traffic areas.

## Phase 2: Deterrence and Redirection



- **Apply Surface Deterrents:** Cover unapproved scratching surfaces with double-sided tape (e.g., Sticky Paws), aluminum foil, or self-adhesive scratch plastic protectors.
- **Neutralize Scents:** Clean previously scratched furniture with an enzymatic cleaner to remove interdigital pheromones, then spray with a calming facial pheromone like Feliway.
- **Enhance Approved Scratching Surfaces:** Sprinkle fresh catnip or silver vine on the new scratching posts; use wand toys to lead the cat onto the scratching surface during play.

## Phase 3: Healthy Claw Maintenance

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- **Acclimation to Handling:** Practice "paw massage" daily, rewarding the cat with highly desired treats (e.g., Churu) for allowing their paws to be touched and squeezed.
- **The Bi-Weekly Trim:** Use sharp, dedicated feline trimmers to remove the needle-like tip of the claw, staying 2–3mm away from the pink quick.
- **Caps as a Bridge:** If property damage continues, apply synthetic nail caps for 4–8 weeks while the behavioral redirection takes hold.

## Phase 4: Behavioral Enrichment and Socialization

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- **Interactive Play:** Provide 10–15 minutes of vigorous play twice daily with wand toys to "work off" the energy that often drives destructive scratching.
- **Positive Reinforcement:** Keep a "treat jar" near the scratching post. Every time the cat is seen using the post, immediately provide a reward and verbal praise. Keep Churu available or feed only when near an appropriate scratching area. Place catnip on appropriate scratching surfaces.
- **Avoid Aversive Correction:** Never hiss, yell, or squirt the cat with water. These actions do not stop the behavior but do increase the cat's anxiety, which can lead to marking behaviors and a fractured relationship.
- **Provide environmental enrichment:** This can include external visual stimuli, such as Catios, window hammocks, or placing a cat tree near a window. Cats prefer high vertical surfaces, so consider installing an elevated horizontal pathway with perch/rest points. Note that some cats may exhibit territorial anxiety if other cats/animals are visible. For these cats, avoid external views.
- **Foraging feeders/puzzle toys:** These provide mental stimulation and reduce boredom

## Considerations for Multi-cat home

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Appropriate resource management can reduce territorial anxiety. This includes litter boxes, sleep/rest areas, food/water, toys, scratchers, and human attention.

- Ensure one litter box per cat plus one, with daily scooping and cleaning every 1–4 weeks.
- Cats generally prefer to sleep apart from other cats. Ensure ample sleeping areas in different sizes and areas of the home.
- Ensure hiding areas are available when social bonding has not occurred.
- Feeding 3–4 meals per day in separate rooms can reduce meal-related anxiety.
- Water bowls should be available in multiple areas of the home.
- Toys should be in adequate supply. Rotate toys weekly to reduce boredom.