

# Managing Feline Scratching: Claw Maintenance and Scent Therapy



When providing scratching surfaces alone is insufficient, these non-surgical options can be used to bridge the gap between the cat's needs and a pet owner's property protection goals.

## Routine Claw Maintenance and Trimming

The most fundamental mechanical alternative is to regularly shorten or trim the claw tips. While this does not stop the urge to scratch, it removes the sharp "hook" that causes damage to fabric and skin.

- **Frequency and Consistency:** Claws should be trimmed every one to two weeks. In kittens, whose nails grow more rapidly, a weekly schedule may be necessary to acclimate them to the handling.
- **The Handling Process:** To ensure a stress-free experience, the cat should be acclimated to paw handling through positive reinforcement. Gently pressing the paw pad to extend the claw allows the owner to identify the "quick"—the pink internal structure containing nerves and blood—and clip only the translucent white tip. Trim 1–2 nails at a time to reduce stress, and trim regularly so cats become accustomed to handling.
- **Tool Selection:** Specialized feline trimmers are preferred over human nail clippers as they are designed to cut without crushing or splintering the keratinous layers of the claw.
- **Medications:** Your veterinarian may recommend medications to aid in low-stress nail trims for your cat.



## Synthetic Nail Caps (e.g., Soft Paws)

---

For owners requiring a higher degree of protection, synthetic nail caps provide a humane and temporary solution. These vinyl caps are applied to the natural claws using a surgical-grade adhesive.

- **How they work:** The caps blunt the sharp tip of the claw, rendering scratching attempts harmless to furniture and human skin.
- **Duration and Replacement:** As the natural nail sheath grows and eventually sheds, the cap will fall off. Most caps require replacement every four to six weeks.
- **Application Protocol:** The process involves trimming the claw tip, filling the cap one-third full with adhesive, and sliding it onto the extended nail. It is essential to observe the cat for several minutes afterward to ensure they do not attempt to chew the new caps off before the glue has fully cured.
- **Realistic outcomes:** It may take time for cats to adjust following the first application. Nail caps must be changed every 4-6 weeks. Nails can still become overgrown and do need to be monitored.

## Pheromone Therapy and Scent Marking

---

Scratching is fundamentally a communicative act, and addressing the cat's emotional state through chemical signaling can significantly reduce the intensity of the behavior.

- **Synthetic Facial Pheromones (e.g., Feliway):** These products mimic the "happy" pheromones cats leave behind when they rub their faces on objects. Spraying Feliway on a previously scratched sofa can signal to the cat that the area is already marked and safe, reducing the perceived need to scratch for territorial security.
- **Semiochemical Attractants:** In some regions, specific interdigital pheromones are available that can be applied to a new scratching post to entice the cat to mark that specific surface. In the US, catnip-based sprays or infusions serve a similar purpose by making the appropriate scratcher the most exciting object in the room.

