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HUMANE OHIO

Humane Ohio operates a high-quality, low-cost spay/neuter clinic. Our vision is a community without homeless pets where every resident has access to affordable spay/neuter.

ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING THAT WILL MAKE YOU AND YOUR CAT HAPPY!

Excerpts taken from Dr. Christianne Schelling, DVM and Traci Shreyer, Animal Behavior Counseling Services

- Declawing can lead to physical, emotional and behavioral complications for your cat. It is erroneous to think that declawing a cat is a trivial procedure similar to trimming fingernails.
- Declawing is a surgical procedure that involves amputating the last joint of the cat's "toes." It is a very painful procedure with strong potential to secondary complications. (It would be like if we cut our finger off down to the knuckle.)
- The front claws are a cat's primary defense. Once declawed, there is no replacement or regrowth of the claws. You may think, "My cat never goes outside." But what if your cat accidentally gets outside and you can't find her? She is now defenseless in a potentially hostile environment.
- Deprived of its front claws, a cat may become insecure and distressed. A cat's display of distress tends to take such forms as urinating on your favorite rug or spraying your antique armoire. Feeling defenseless without her claws, your kitty may become hostile to people (including you) and to other cats, and become more apt to bite.
- Some cats develop an aversion to their litter box because of the pain associated with scratching in the litter after a declawing procedure. If your cat doesn't go in the box, she will find a more comfortable place to do her business. Often times, these habits are hard to break.

For more information on declawing, please visit www.declawing.com.

Understand your cat's need to scratch and forget punishment (it doesn't work!) What are the options instead of declawing?

- Provide a suitable place for your cat to scratch.
- Make the scratching post attractive to your cat (example – provide a sisal scratching post). The Toledo Area Humane Society often has large cat trees available for purchase for very reasonable prices!
- Make the place she's been scratching unattractive with physical or scent related deterrents or double sided tape (cats don't like to walk on sticky things!).
- Whenever possible, start cats young with appropriate scratching toys.
- Trim your cat's claws regularly.
- For indoor cats, consider Soft Paws® (www.softpaws.com) as extra insurance, or an easy alternative. They're small covers for kitty's nails so when she scratches, the nail cover protects the furniture, wall, etc. from being scratched.

A word about punishment – don't do it!

Cats don't understand physical punishment. In addition to it being wrong to hit your cat, punishment simply doesn't work and is likely to make your situation worse. Clever though kitty is about many things, she won't understand that you're punishing her for scratching the couch. She will only compute that sometimes when you catch her she is treated badly. This may make her insecure and stimulate her to scratch more or develop other undesirable behavior problems. Eventually you will break the trust and security that is the basis for your cat's relationship with you, and you will find it very difficult to catch her for any reason at all.

ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING THAT WILL MAKE YOU AND YOUR CAT HAPPY! continued

Marking their territory

Scratching is a territorial instinct by which cats place their mark and establish their turf. Through scratching, cats mark their domains with more than just visible signs of claw marks. Cats' paws also have scent glands that leave their own special scent on their territory. This is why they mark the most visible portions of your house. It's your cat's way of adding her own personal touch to your (and her) home, her version of interior decorating.

Exercise

Scratching also serves to keep your cat in shape. The act of scratching stretches and pulls and works the muscles of a cat's front quarters – like kitty yoga.

Sheer pleasure

It feels good to scratch, so give up the idea of reforming your cat's desire to scratch. Rechannel her to scratch where you want her to. You'll both be happier.

Provide your cat with an appropriate scratching post

Give your cat a surface that helps her meet the goal of scratching to leave a mark. Good items are pressed cardboard or wood because of the bark. The scratching post needs to be stable because cats will not use it again if it falls on them and surprises them. Make sure it is tall enough for your cat to stretch up fully upon. An example is the Purrfect Post (www.purrfectpost.com). Sisal scratching posts (sisal textile materials, not the sisal rope) are also good because it's a material she can shred to pieces with great satisfaction. Studies have shown most cats prefer to mark their territory with vertical shredding marks; sisal textile provides the perfect texture and grain for this behavior.

Placement is important. Place scratching posts in areas where the territory changes in meaning for your cat, such as where your cat goes to eat, sleep or eliminate, or areas where your cat may be exposed to other cats (like on the edge of where other cats live if you have them separated).

For a cat with a scratching problem already, place a really appealing scratching post right by the inappropriate spot she is scratching because she already has a habit of going there for this activity. It helps to change the texture of the item you don't want her to scratch (like putting tape on it, or foil, or sticky tape). The trick is to make the old thing unappealing and the new post very appealing. Once your cat has had about 30 days to form this new habit, you can move the scratching post slowly to a new area if you wish (only move a couple of inches a day).

How to get your cat to prefer the post

You can also do some things to encourage your cat to scratch where you want her to. Cats can be rewarded for behaviors with clicker training (a helpful Web site is Karen Pryor's site www.clickertraining.com). If you are using clicker training, and catch your cat on the right post, then click and give her a treat. You can also purchase "Pavlov's Cat" Cat Scratch Feeder (available at www.petco.com) which automatically dispenses food when your cat scratches the post.

There are other ways to encourage your cat to use the desired scratching area:

- If your cat enjoys catnip (and is not negatively affected), rub catnip on the post or take water from a tuna fish can and rub that on the post.
- Make all associations with the post pleasurable: reward her with a favorite treat when she uses it, have her chase a string or a toy around it, or attach toys to it (which will result in her digging her claws into it).
- If your cat is doing a lot of scratching, check to see if there is some kind of stress in her territory (all cats scratch, but a high level of scratching could be a sign of stress). One woman's cats were shredding her wallpaper on one particular wall as high as they could reach. The wall was directly across from where outdoor community cats would come up on her porch. The outdoor cats agitated her indoor cats so the indoor cats were scratching instead of spraying to express their resistance to the territorial invasion.
- Remember that your cat has marked her favorite spots with her scent as well as her claws. You may need to remove her scent with pet odor removers from the areas you want to distract her from. Some cats have an aversion to citrus odors. Use lemon-scented sprays or a potpourri of lemon and orange peels to make areas less desirable.
- If your cat still persists in scratching the furniture, try squirting her with a water gun or a spray bottle set on stream or use a loud whistle or other noise-maker. You must employ these deterrents while she is scratching for them to be effective. The point is to establish an aversion to the spot you don't want her to scratch.

ALTERNATIVES TO DECLAWING THAT WILL MAKE YOU AND YOUR CAT HAPPY! continued

Start them young

If you have a kitten, consider yourself fortunate. It's much easier to initiate good habit patterns than to correct undesirable ones. Cats are creatures of habit; start them off with good ones. From the beginning, teach your kitten the appropriate place to scratch. Use the methods described above, especially playing around the scratching post to capture her interest. Take advantage of your kitten's desire to play and attach toys to the post. She will soon "dig in" to catch her toy and discover how good it feels to scratch this surface.

Do **not** take her paws and make her scratch the post. This is a major turn-off and will only inspire a bratty "you can't make me" attitude. Even at an early age, cats refuse to be coerced into doing what they don't want to do. If she starts to scratch an inappropriate object, immediately place her in front of her scratching post and begin petting her. Some cats will begin kneading when petted, thus digging their claws into the desired surface and establishing this as a fine place to scratch.

Soft Paws®

If you have a strictly indoor cat, you have another very desirable option, a wonderful product called Soft Paws®. These are lightweight vinyl caps that you apply over your cat's own claws. They have rounded edges, so your cat's scratching doesn't damage your home and furnishings. You can order Soft Paws at www.softpaws.com or 1-800-989-2542, or purchase them at Humane Ohio: 3131 Tremainsville, Toledo OH 43613 (we're open M – F from 7:30 am – 5 pm).

Soft Paws should be used **only on indoor cats** since they blunt one of the cat's chief means of self-defense. Soft Paws last approximately six weeks once your cat becomes accustomed to them. They may feel a bit strange to her at first and she may groom them excessively causing them to come off sooner. She'll get used to them quickly though, and thereafter they will last longer. It is amazing how well cats tolerate the Soft Paws; most don't even notice they are wearing them.

Soft Paws are vinyl caps that you fill with the glue that comes with them and slide over each nail. They last 4 – 6 weeks, and as each cap falls off, you trim the cat's nail and put a new one on. They come in a variety of fun colors. They are generally applied to the front paws only, since these are what cause most of the destruction to your home. You may find one or two caps missing from time to time, and these are easily replaced using the adhesive included in the kit.