DESTRUCTIVE SCRATCHING

Understanding and Managing Your Cat's Scratching Habits

Why Do Cats Scratch?

Cats scratch for various reasons:

- **Play and Exercise:** Scratching is a natural part of play and helps with stretching.
- **Marking Territory:** Cats have scent glands in their paws and use scratching to mark their territory.
- **Communication:** Scratching can be a warning signal to other cats.
- **Claw Maintenance:** Scratching removes frayed outer claws, keeping them sharp and healthy.

While scratching is natural, it can cause damage to furniture, carpets, and other household items. Instead of trying to stop your cat from scratching, redirect them to appropriate scratching surfaces.

How to Encourage Appropriate Scratching

1. **Provide Scratching Posts:** Offer a variety of scratching posts with different textures such as cardboard, carpet, wood, and sisal. Ensure the posts are sturdy and tall enough for your cat to stretch fully.
2. **Make the Posts Attractive:** Place posts in accessible areas, use catnip, and attach toys to entice your cat.
3. **Discourage Inappropriate Scratching:** Cover furniture with double-sided tape, sandpaper, or upside-down vinyl carpet runners. Position scratching posts near favorite scratching spots.
4. **Trim Your Cat's Nails:** Regular nail trimming reduces damage from scratching.
5. **Consider Soft Claw Caps:** Temporary plastic caps can prevent damage while allowing normal scratching behavior.
6. **Use Deterrents as a Last Resort:** If your cat scratches inappropriate items, try clapping your hands or using a gentle spray of water. Avoid making them fearful of you.
7. **Seek Professional Help if Needed:** Consult a veterinary behaviorist if scratching becomes a major issue.

What NOT to Do

- **Never Force Your Cat to Scratch a Post:** Forcing your cat’s paws onto a post can create fear and aversion.
- **Don’t Discard Old Scratching Posts:** Worn-out posts are often preferred because they are familiar and already marked with the cat's scent.

Should You Declaw Your Cat?

Declawing is **strongly discouraged** as it is an amputation of the last bone in each toe, causing significant pain and potential long-term complications. The procedure does not resolve behavioral issues and should only be considered in extreme cases where no other options are viable and the cat is at risk of euthanasia.

Alternatives to Declawing

- **Regular Nail Trimming:** Keeps claws manageable.
- **Providing Scratching Options:** Encourage use of posts, pads, and climbing structures.
- **Deterrents for Unwanted Scratching:** Use double-sided tape or protective coverings.
- **Proper Handling and Training:** Understanding cat behavior reduces the risk of scratches.

By offering appropriate scratching surfaces and using positive reinforcement, you can protect your home while allowing your cat to engage in its natural behavior.