

CLAWING BACK THE DESTRUCTION

Control the itch to scratch

Scratching is considered a normal behaviour in cats. Scratching things is an inherited trait and cats do it instinctively, but it is also learned from their mother early on in life. Cats scratch in order to leave a visual and olfactory (i.e. smell) territorial marker. Their scent comes from sweat glands located in their paws. To a lesser extent, they also scratch in order to condition and trim their claws, and to provide muscle toning for their front legs, but this is not essential.

To treat destructive scratching, training involves three aspects: prevention, teaching, and correction. Prevention is accomplished by first scratch-proofing your home. This is done by closing-off problem areas and keeping your cat confined to an area that does not have any "scratchable" objects. If necessary, cover furniture temporarily with plastic and move your curtains out of reach.

Provide a scratching post or board (or more than one). The post should be of sufficient size and texture to make it appealing to your cat and be sturdy enough to

prevent tipping over. The preferred covering should have a longitudinal weave that allows your cat to dig its claws in and get a long stroke. The post should also be taller than your cat when it stands on its hind legs. It must be placed close to where your cat sleeps, since most cats mark their territory near their sleeping areas and prefer to scratch shortly after waking up.

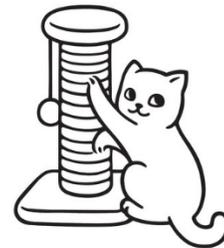
Other hints to minimize scratching include keeping the nails closely trimmed, providing enough play toys, and, if possible, allowing your cat access to the outdoors (under supervision).

You can train your cat to use the scratch post by rubbing the surface with catnip and by rubbing your cat's paws gently on the post (cats prefer previously-scratched objects). If your cat wishes to use an object other than the post for scratching, give him a firm "no", bring him to the post and once again gently rub his paws on the post. You may want to give praise or a treat when the post is used.

Finally, if these steps prove unsuccessful, you can try applying remote

correction. This involves hiding out of sight (or using a video camera or mirror around a corner) and applying an unpleasant stimulus whenever your cat scratches the drapes or furniture. Unpleasant stimuli may involve a loud noise, water sprayer, a tin can filled with marbles or a small pillow or stuffed toy thrown near your cat. In this way, your cat will identify the negative stimuli with the act of scratching, rather than with you.

If all else fails, you can discuss the pros and cons of declawing with your veterinarian. While declawing is a safe and humane procedure, it remains controversial and your veterinarian can best advise you on whether or not it is a suitable option for your cat.

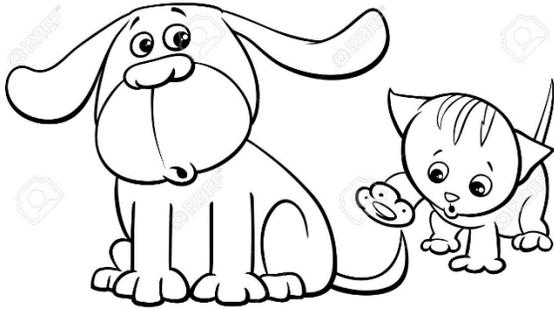


From animalhealthcare.ca

IN THE DOGHOUSE

Introducing a Cat to a Canine's Home

By Kerry Vinson, B.A.



There are lots of literary references to cats and dogs in books and magazines, as well as numerous movies and cartoons, which often suggest an adversarial relationship between these two creatures. This need not be the case, and I'm sure that most people who keep both of these animals under the same roof wouldn't want it to be so. This brings up an important issue – how to introduce a cat into a home that already has a dog.

The answer to this question depends a lot on one important piece of information: Was the dog socialized to cats when it was a puppy? If so, then it should be a relatively uncomplicated endeavor. To be on the safe side, I would recommend that the dog be on a leash to prevent any unexpected reactions to the new family member. If after the initial introduction you see no signs of potential aggression, then the leash can be removed, as long as you are able to supervise the new housemates until you are confident that there won't be any problems.

On the other hand, if the dog has not been socialized to cats, or if you aren't

sure (as in the case of an older adopted dog), then you need to be much more cautious. That's not to say that an older dog can't be desensitized to accept the presence of a cat. In some situations, the best that can be accomplished is to teach these two critters to tolerate each other. There are specific behaviour modification techniques that credible animal trainers can demonstrate that may be helpful (ask your veterinarian for a referral). The bottom line is to always err on the side of caution by keeping the animals involved (especially the dog) under control until you are sure it is safe to leave them unsupervised.

With the proper amounts of time, patience, knowledge, and commitment on the part of pet owners, almost anything is possible when it comes to modifying animal behaviour. Indeed, over the years, I have been in many hundreds of households that contain both dogs and cats living in peaceful coexistence.