



Gardner Animal Care Center  
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## **Alternatives to Declawing**

In many cases declawing can be avoided if consistent training is started young. Cats and kittens have a strong and natural desire to play and explore. Scratching is a normal behavior that allows your cat to condition its claws and mark its territory. It also provides a nice stretch. The best way to prevent scratching is by providing an environment that meets your cat's needs.

The first consideration is to provide a safe, stimulating environment. Cat-proof your home and build a play center where your cat can climb, perch and scratch. To draw attention to your scratching post, try sprinkling catnip on it. Provide a few toys your cat can bat around, such as spring-mounted, dangling or bouncy toys. Give your cat food rewards when it approaches its post. Some cats enjoy climbing into empty cardboard boxes. Avoid tempting your kitten into play by teasing it with your fingers- you may end up with a play-biting cat.

You should also keep your cats nails trimmed. This may need to be done on a weekly basis. If you need assistance, contact our office so we can set up a time for a technician to show you.

To keep your cat away from problem areas, first try child locks, barricades, or closed doors. For persistent problems or areas that cannot be barricaded, use remote punishment, taste and odor aversion, or booby traps as deterrents. Never use physical punishment- it may cause your cat to fear you and to avoid the problem area only when you're around. If you can remain out of sight and use remote punishment, your cat should learn without fearing you. Use a water gun or loud noise to stop the behavior. Other options include aversive odor (perfume, deodorant soap, citrus oil) or booby traps (motion activated alarms or a stack of plastic cups set up to topple).

If your cat continues to scratch in an inappropriate area, put a scratching post there. Food rewards will keep your cat interested in the post. If destructive scratching persists, cover the area with plastic or strips of double-sided contact paper. Another option is to use plastic coverings that fit over your cat's nails called Soft Paws. If you have sincerely tried to solve the problem but still encounter destructive scratching, declawing may be a final consideration. For more information on declawing, contact our Veterinary Health Care Team.