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The function and importance of cat scratching posts by REBECCA SUE

Article published on February 3rd 2012 | Business

A natural behavior in cats is to periodically hook their front claws into suitable surfaces and pull backwards. This marks their territory, exercises their legs, and sharpens their claws. They also use scratching as a way to threaten other cats, for playing, and for getting rid of their old nails so that new, sharper nails can grow. Cats often scratch while they stretch out; but unfortunately cats can cause damage to furniture, curtains and other things when they do so. Indoor cats benefit from being provided with a scratching post so that they are less likely to use carpet or furniture which they can easily ruin.

The most common type of post consists of a wooden post covered in rough fabric or sisal. The post is mounted vertically in a wide base, which allows the cat to stretch upward on its rear legs and scratch freely without tipping it over. A post that is unstable or does not allow a cat to fully extend its body might put off the cat from using it. Scratching post surfaces vary. Some scratching posts are covered with carpeting or upholstery, but some authorities advise against this practice, as not making it clear to the cat which surfaces are permissible and which are not; they suggest using a plain wooden surface, or reversing the carpeting on the posts so that the rougher texture of the carpet backing is a more attractive alternative to the cat than the floor covering.

Many pet owners find they have to experiment with different surfaces to find one on which their cats will scratch reliably. Some experts say that cats generally prefer sisal or corrugated cardboard surfaces. Other kinds of scratching posts are more elaborate, with several levels of horizontal platforms for climbing and cozy cave-like areas where cats may hide. Very tall scratching posts are often called "cat trees." These may have a vertical tension rod that extends to the ceiling to provide extra stability. Larger cat scratchers and Cat Scratching Posts can give every cat enough places for playing, climbing, lounging and sleeping. The behaviors of cats differ, so it is best to be sure what works for your cat before settling on one kind of surface.

Smaller scratching surfaces may consist of something as simple as a piece of carpet turned upside down, or a flat pad of woven sisal with a loop to allow it to hang from a doorknob. Others are made from corrugated fiberboard. In many cases, however, what is more important than the scratching post is the knowledge cat companions have about how to train cats. Training a cat to claw an approved surface and nothing else requires understanding simple behavior modification techniques and finding a reward the cat will perform for.

Scratching posts may be purchased at most stores that carry pet supplies and online, but many people build their own. Vendors that sell cat scratching posts often have persons with the expertise to offer advice to cat-owners about cat scratching. It therefore behooves those looking for cat scratching products to do a thorough search to get the best value.

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Article Keywords:
Cat Scratching Posts,Cat Scratching.

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