Midwest Ragdolls Highlights Why Scratching Is a Normal Part of Cat Behavior

Veterinarian Dr. Jennifer Creed explains why cats scratch household surfaces and how owners can encourage healthy scratching habits while protecting their furniture.

Elburn, Illinois Nov 12, 2026 (Issuewire.com) - A kitten scratching the corner of a couch or digging its claws into a favorite chair can quickly become frustrating for new cat owners. However, Dr. Jennifer Creed, founder of Midwest Ragdolls and an experienced small-animal veterinarian, wants families to understand that scratching is not a sign of disobedience or bad behavior.

Scratching is a natural feline activity that serves several important purposes. Cats use their claws to stretch, maintain their nails, and mark their surroundings. These behaviors are present even in kittens that have never lived outdoors.

According to Creed, the key to managing scratching is not trying to stop it entirely, but providing appropriate places for cats to express this instinct.

"When a kitten scratches the arm of a couch, it isn't thinking about ruining the furniture," says Creed. "It's using its claws in a way that feels natural. Owners have to provide an acceptable alternative and help the kitten understand where scratching belongs."

Why Do Cats Scratch Furniture?

Scratching serves several functions in a cat's daily life.

One purpose is claw maintenance. As cats scratch, they help remove the outer layers of their claws. Scratching also lets them stretch their muscles, especially through their shoulders, back, and front legs.

Cats also have scent glands in their paws, meaning scratching can leave both visible and scent-based marks in their environment.

These natural behaviors help explain why cats may repeatedly return to particular pieces of furniture or household surfaces.

Creed notes that owners sometimes mistake repeated scratching for stubbornness when the cat may simply prefer a particular location or texture.

"A kitten that keeps going back to the same chair is telling you something about that spot," Creed says. "It might like the height, the material, or the location. Instead of only focusing on stopping the scratching, look at what makes that surface appealing."

Understanding those preferences makes it easier to choose an appropriate scratching post or mat.

Choosing the Right Scratching Surface

Not every cat prefers the same type of scratching surface.

Some cats enjoy stretching upward against tall posts, while others prefer scratching horizontally along

the floor. Materials can also make a difference, with cats showing individual preferences for cardboard, sisal, carpet, or other suitable textures.

Creed recommends giving kittens opportunities to explore different options rather than assuming one scratching post will work for every animal.

A vertical scratching post should be sturdy enough to remain stable when the cat leans against it. It should also be tall enough to allow the animal to stretch comfortably.

For kittens that prefer scratching along the ground, a horizontal cardboard scratcher or mat may be more appealing.

"People sometimes buy a small scratching post, put it in a corner, and wonder why the cat ignores it," Creed says. "If the post wobbles or doesn't allow the cat to stretch properly, the couch may simply be a better scratching surface from the cat's point of view."

Owners may need to experiment with different styles before discovering what their cat prefers.

Location Can Make a Big Difference

Where you place a scratching post can be just as important as the post itself.

A scratching surface hidden in a basement or unused room may receive little attention, particularly if the kitten spends most of its time with family members elsewhere in the house.

Creed encourages owners to place scratching options in areas where their cats naturally spend time.

For example, if a kitten repeatedly scratches the corner of a couch, placing a scratching post nearby may make the new surface easier to discover and use.

You can also place scratching posts near resting areas because cats may enjoy stretching and scratching after waking up.

The veterinary behavior guidance Creed shares with kitten owners recommends providing scratching surfaces in both the kitten's safe room and areas where the family spends time together.

"If a kitten spends every evening in the living room, that's where it needs an appropriate place to scratch," Creed says. "Putting a scratching post somewhere the kitten rarely visits doesn't give it much reason to change its habits."

How to Redirect Unwanted Scratching

When a kitten begins scratching furniture, Creed recommends focusing on redirection and consistency rather than punishment.

Owners can encourage interest in an appropriate scratching surface by placing toys near it, incorporating play around the area, or rewarding the kitten when it uses the post.

If the kitten repeatedly returns to a particular piece of furniture, owners can temporarily protect that surface while encouraging the use of a nearby scratcher.

Providing several suitable scratching options may be particularly helpful during the early months when kittens are still developing their household routines.

Creed also advises owners to avoid frightening their cats when correcting unwanted behavior.

"A kitten needs to feel comfortable exploring its home," Creed says. "If every mistake results in a frightening experience, you may create a different problem without actually teaching the kitten where it should scratch."

Instead, she encourages owners to watch what the kitten is doing, calmly interrupt unwanted scratching, and guide the animal toward a more suitable surface.

Building Good Habits Early

Creed believes the first months in a kitten's new home provide an important opportunity to establish appropriate habits.

Young cats are naturally curious, and their preferences can develop through repeated experiences. Introducing scratching surfaces early allows kittens to discover acceptable outlets before furniture scratching becomes an established routine.

At Midwest Ragdolls, Creed combines her experience as a practicing veterinarian with more than three decades of raising Ragdoll kittens. She encourages families to approach normal feline behavior with patience and realistic expectations.

Owners shouldn't expect to eliminate scratching. It is a natural activity that cats need appropriate opportunities to perform throughout their lives.

"Owners don't have to choose between having a cat and protecting their furniture," Creed says. "The important thing is understanding what the cat needs and making the appropriate choice easy for it. A good scratching post in the right location can make a real difference."

About Midwest Ragdolls

Midwest Ragdolls is a family-run Ragdoll cattery located in Elburn, Illinois. Founded in 1993 by Dr. Jennifer Creed, a practicing small-animal veterinarian, the cattery raises purebred Ragdoll kittens for families throughout the Midwest and across the United States. Midwest Ragdolls emphasizes kitten health, early development, and responsible breeding practices.

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