

Ask Cheryl

Animal behavior tips

This week:
The Night Owl Cat



Q: My cat is driving us crazy. She stays up all night playing, meowing and jumping on us. We've tried locking her out of our room, but she meows and claws at the door. My husband is ready to throw her outside, but she's an indoor cat and I don't like the idea of her being loose outside. Is there anything we can do to turn her days and nights around? My husband pokes the cat during the day when she's sleeping out of frustration! I'm tempted to do the same when I'm exhausted and see her soundly asleep in a sunbeam.

A: Cats are nocturnal and prefer to be up at night. They also tend to sleep 16 - 17 hours a day, so they are very rested. It doesn't sound like it's necessary for your cat to go hunting in the evening. (Some cats, like mine, are in the house to mouse all night, so I want them alert and hunting.) You can take some steps to turn your cat's schedule around so everyone can get a good night's sleep at the same time.

Your husband actually has the right idea by poking the cat, although I think his intentions are a little more revenge-based than training. Keeping your cat awake more during the day will help her be more tired in the evening. However, rather than poking her, I suggest making it a little more fun by playing games using toys on a string or a laser light. Put a bird feeder outside a window and a tall cat tree by the window so she has some entertainment instead of sleeping. Some cats enjoy watching television. I have one cat who is a NASCAR fan. She loves to sit on top of the TV and paw at the cars as they go around on the screen. By giving your cat stimulating things to do during daylight hours, she will be more likely to sleep in the evening.

At night, provide the cat with a warm and comfortable bed in a location away from your bedroom. Keep your door closed. Play with your cat right before bedtime and end the play with a little snack (for her, but you can have one too if you want). This will simulate the hunt, chase, capture, and eating of prey, which is usually followed by sleep.

Don't feed your cat first thing in the morning as this may cause her to wake you up early to serve breakfast. If you have to get to work, you may want to consider an automatic feeder that dispenses food throughout the day. This will make the cat less dependent on you for food first

thing in the morning and keep the cat moving during the day. If you can't get a timed feeder, put small amounts of food in food dispensing toys like a KONG (yes, these are for cats too) or a food dispensing ball and also hide kibble around the house. Feed the largest meal at the end of the day after your last play session.

If the nighttime meowing continues after trying all this, you can discourage the cat from coming near your door by using a Scatt canister. This is a device with a remote control that sprays a puff of air with a "shhh" noise. Most cats will stay away from the area where this keeps happening. By placing the device on the floor by your door, the cat will be less likely to meow in that area. If the cat is not phased by this device, you may want to invest in a Scat Mat. This is a mat that gives a slight electrical pulse when stepped on. Putting this outside your door at night will stop the cat from pawing and meowing at the door. I'm not a big fan of negative corrections, but when our sanity is involved and it's a very minor correction it's some times a necessity. (Word of caution: if you use a Scat Mat outside your door, DO NOT step out the door with bare feet. It's only like a static electric shock when you touch metal, but it will wake you up. It's great in deterring your midnight snacking, though. I'm speaking from experience here. I said I want my cats to hunt at night. What I didn't mention is that they still decided my room was more interesting than chasing the mice who inhabit the old schoolhouse where I live.)

The important thing to remember is that you should ignore all your cat's evening antics. If you give up and let the cat into your room, she will only meow and paw more in the future. Letting the cat have her way will reinforce and increase the negative behavior. Turning a cat's schedule around isn't difficult, but it does take a little effort and creativity on your part. Make this a fun challenge to overcome so everyone can sleep at night. If you keep your cat up enough during the day, you may end up with a nice bed-warmer at your feet at night.

Send your questions and stories to:

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When Pruning Trees, Consider Carefully Before You Cut

When to prune your trees depends on why you're pruning.

"Anything that is diseased or damaged can pretty much be removed throughout the year," said horticulturist Mark Viette, co-owner of Viette Nurseries and a syndicated television garden host. He said early spring and fall are good times for pruning deciduous trees to get a desired shape.

"When all the leaves fall, it's easier to see the whole tree."

Viette recommended opening up the center of a tree - "so you can throw a softball or a football through"-to allow sunlight to better reach all the leaves. That can result in stronger branches, but don't overdo it.

"I really don't like to prune more than 20 percent at any one time."

Tipping back the ends of

especially long evergreen and other branches will keep them from drooping so much next winter if they're holding snow or ice.

Avoid pruning a branch off flush, Viette said, but try not to leave a lot of stumpy appendages. "You don't want to prune that natural branch collar," where the branch meets the rest of the tree, "but you don't want to leave stubs. And always trim back to a branch or a bud."

When using a saw, notch the bottom of the branch before starting to work on its top. The technique produces a smoother, faster-healing cut.

And always be mindful of your own safety, Viette added. A bench or a ladder is a precarious place to be handling a saw or shears.

"When you need to get up in the tree, hire a professional."

Caring for Creatures Pet of the Week

Chuckie

Male



Chuckie (affectionately known as 'Chuckie Cheese' by CFC staffers) has quickly become a favorite at the Sanctuary. What's not to love about this sweet, cuddly, lap-cat kind of guy! The amazing thing about him is the fact he was a stray for probably most of his short life and remarkably has matured into a very loving and trusting kitty.

Chuckie is a two year old short-haired light gray tabby, neutered, and up to date on vaccines. In addition to being handsome and sweet, he loves giving kisses to all willing participants. Of course this is more characteristic of dogs but oh, why not, Chuckie decided it was his thing too. Why not plan a visit to Caring For Creatures and meet this kissin' kitty.

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