



Cat Behaviour Guide

Litterbox Training



Cats have individual preferences when it comes to litterboxes! Here are some tips to help encourage your cat to use their litterbox and prevent unwanted messes.

Litterbox Location

Litterboxes should be placed in a quiet, accessible, and safe location for your cat. Place the litterbox in a relatively undisturbed area in your home. Ensure the location is accessible for your cat. For example, senior cats with mobility issues or kittens may not be able to access an area by stairs, such as a basement or an upper level.

Noise and activity are also important considerations. For example, if you place the litterbox in a furnace or laundry room, the noise from the furnace or laundry machines may startle your cat! An area with a lot of foot traffic may also disturb your cat. Some cats may fear the noise produced by self-cleaning litterboxes.

Try to separate the litterbox from your cat's food and water dishes, and preferred resting areas. Keep the litterbox in a separate room, away from these sources.

If you keep the litterbox in a room with a closing door, make sure the door is wedged from both sides so you don't accidentally lock your feline friend inside! You may even want to install a pet door, to allow ease of entry and exit for your cat while being able to keep the door closed.

Multiple-Cat Households

If you have multiple cats in your household, provide one litterbox per cat and an additional box. For example, if you have two cats, you should provide three litterboxes in your home. This helps to prevent guarding and disputes over litterbox access. The litterboxes should be placed away from each other, in a manner that prevents the cats from crossing paths. Cats also have individual preferences, so you may have to provide different litter substrates and/or litterboxes for each cat.

Litter Substrate

Most cats generally prefer a clumping litter that is fine-grained and unscented. A high-quality, dust-free clay litter is also acceptable. Avoid scented or deodorized litters, especially those with a citrus scent, as many cats find this unpleasant. Try to also keep the litter substrate consistent. Suddenly changing the type of litter may upset your cat and cause them to eliminate outside of their litterbox. In terms of litter depth, provide enough litter to absorb urine. A recommended depth is approximately 3-4 cm. Do not fill the box with excessive amounts of litter.



Litterbox Cleanliness

It is very important to keep your cat's litterbox regularly cleaned. Fecal matter and clumped litter should be removed daily. Ideally, the entire box should be emptied and cleaned once per week. Your cat will find a buildup of ammonia, fecal matter, or clumping of litter unpleasant, which might deter them from using their litterbox. You can also try adding a thin layer of baking soda on the bottom of the litterbox to help absorb some odors.

When cleaning your cat's litterbox, avoid using strong-smelling chemicals. Some cleaning compounds are harmful to cats. A safe option is soap and hot water, to allow for an efficient and safe clean!

Another option is a plastic liner, but be cautious. Some cats find the plastic liner unpleasant. You can experiment to see if your cat will accept a liner in their litter box, or not. The liner should be secure and replaced as needed.

Litterbox Design

Cats also have individual preferences for different litterboxes! The size of the litterbox should be appropriate for your cat. Your cat's litterbox should be one and a half times longer than your cat, from nose to tail. A litterbox that is too small for your cat can prevent litterbox use.

Ensure the design of the litterbox allows for ease of access. Senior cats with mobility issues may have issues entering a litterbox with high sides.

Some people prefer covered litterboxes to hide the sight and smell. However, consider the following issues that could arise with a covered litterbox:

- Covered litterboxes can retain an ammonia smell from urine, which cats find unpleasant. A covered litterbox will also require more frequent cleaning, due to the retention of odors. You may also forget to clean the litterbox, as the mess is less visible.
- Covered litterboxes may restrict your cat's movement, preventing comfortable maneuvering during elimination.
- For multi-cat households, one cat may guard the litterbox and ambush another cat by hiding in the covered box. Fear of the litterbox may prevent use by the targeted cat.

If the cleanliness of a covered litterbox is maintained, a shy or timid cat may prefer a covered litterbox for increased privacy. You may have to do some experimenting to find your cat's preference.



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Your cat will instinctually want to bury their waste in a suitable substrate. As long as you provide an accessible and clean litterbox, your cat should use it. You may want to bring your cat to their litterbox location (when first introduced to your home) so they know where the litterbox is.

Do NOT force your cat into the litterbox or rub your cat's paws in the litter. This will not encourage your cat to use their box and may cause them to be fearful and avoid using it.

If Problems Occur

If your cat begins to eliminate outside of their litterbox, especially if the change is sudden, contact your veterinarian for advice. Some medical conditions can cause this sudden change in behaviour. Do NOT punish your cat for not using their litterbox. If your veterinarian rules out any medical conditions, then the issues may be remedied with a behaviour modification plan.

Did You Know?

You can also ask us behavioural questions by emailing:

askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com

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