



Cats instinctively use a litterbox when their physical and emotional needs are met—no training required! This guide will help you understand your cat’s preferences and avoid common pitfalls, so they’ll always feel comfortable using their litterbox, even during stressful times.

Options Are Important

The most important recommendation is to have the right number of litterboxes. It is best to have at minimum one box per cat, plus one extra. For example, if you have three cats, you’ll need at least four boxes.

Some cats don’t like using the same box for both urinating and defecating, making two boxes essential, even if you only have one cat. If your cat explores multiple floors in your home (like the basement, main floor and upstairs), place a litterbox on each floor. In multi-cat households, having extra boxes can help reduce conflicts.

Tips for Choosing a Litterbox

Find the Right Size: Your litterbox should be at least 1.5 times the length of your cat (from nose to tail base) and twice their width. This gives them enough space to turn around, dig and cover their waste without stepping out of the box. Since most commercial boxes are too small, consider using larger, inexpensive alternatives like under-the-bed storage bins or cement mixing tubs.

Consider Locations: Litterboxes should always be accessible and feel safe to your cat. Find quiet, low-traffic areas that are close to the areas where your cat already spends time. Here are some other tips:

- Keep litterboxes at least 5 feet away from food, water and sleeping areas.
- Avoid placing them near loud appliances like furnaces or washing machines.
- Ensure your cat always has access—prop doors open or install a pet door to prevent them from being locked out.
- Avoid bathrooms, where doors are often closed, unless there is another box nearby.

Keep your cat’s life stage and health status in mind. Kittens or cats with decreased mobility may struggle to get to their litterbox when they need it, so try to keep their boxes close to their main living spaces.

Styles of Litterboxes



Many cats prefer simple, open litterboxes with low entrances. While covered litterboxes are popular with people, they often aren't ideal for cats.

- **Covered Litterboxes:** While they keep litter inside and hide waste, covered boxes can be too small, trap smells and prevent proper digging. Cats may feel cornered or startled when exiting. Some cats may still prefer covered boxes, so offer multiple options to see what your cat prefers. If you choose a covered box, ensure it is cleaned regularly, large, well-ventilated and has a clear door so your cat can see outside.
- **Top Entry Litterboxes:** These are usually too small and require cats to jump in and out through a small hole, which can be inconvenient and even painful, especially for older cats.
- **Automatic Litterboxes:** While convenient for people, these are usually too small and can be noisy and unpredictable. Some have started cleaning cycles with cats still inside, causing injury or fear.

Note: We do not recommend top-entry or automatic litterboxes due to these risks.

Selecting Cat Litter

Choosing the right cat litter is essential for your cat's comfort and overall well-being. This section will guide you through the most important factors to consider, from texture to depth, so you can provide a litter that meets your cat's preferences.

- **Texture Matters:** Most cats prefer fine-grained, unscented, clumping, clay-based litter, as it mimics the sandy textures they instinctively seek. Rough or pellet litter can feel uncomfortable on their paws, and scented litter may overwhelm their sensitive noses. While some cats adapt to alternative litters like corn, wheat or grass seed, clay-based litters are typically preferred.
- **Litter Depth:** Cats need enough litter to dig and cover their waste. Typically, they prefer 1 to 3 inches. Consider offering less litter on one side and more on the other to create a gradient within the box or providing two boxes with different depths to see what your cat prefers.
- **Changing Litter:** Sudden changes can stress your cat, so introduce new litter gradually by mixing it with their current litter. Put the new litter at the bottom and the old litter on top and gradually increase the percentage of new litter while decreasing the amount of old litter. While transitioning, have a familiar litterbox with the old litter to help your cat adjust.



Tip: Exposing kittens to a variety of litter types when they are young can help them become more accepting of different litter when they are older.

Maintaining & Cleaning the Litterbox

Cats like to be clean, and just because you scooped yesterday doesn't mean the box is clean today! Keep their box as fresh as possible to avoid issues.

- **Daily Scooping:** All boxes should be scooped at least once per day, or more often for small boxes and multi-cat households. Be sure to scrape the bottom and sides to remove all waste.
- **Regular Washing:** Empty, wash and refill boxes every 1-4 weeks, depending on usage. Use mild dish soap and warm water to clean. Be sure to rinse thoroughly. Below are a few washing tips:
 1. Clean one box at a time – This ensures your cat always has access to a litterbox and makes the task more manageable.
 2. Dispose of old litter properly – Empty the litter into the garbage. Never flush or pour clumping litter down the drain, as it can clog pipes. If you use compostable litter, check your city's guidelines before placing it in a compost bin.
 3. Wash with warm water and dish soap – Use a dedicated brush to scrub the litterbox, removing any waste stuck to the plastic.
 - Avoid strong scents (especially citrus), bleach or harsh cleaners, as they can damage the plastic or leave a smell that bothers your cat.
 - Many household cleaners, such as Pine-Sol, are toxic to cats. If in doubt, ask your vet about safe products.
 4. Clean the cover – If your litterbox has a cover, be sure to wash the inside as well.
 5. Rinse thoroughly – Make sure to remove all soap residue to avoid leaving any scents or chemicals that could irritate your cat.
 6. Dry the box – Let the box air dry or use paper towels to wipe it down.
 7. Refill with fresh litter – Add clean litter to the depth your cat prefers, usually between 1 and 3 inches.
- **Replace As Needed:** Replace litterboxes every few years, especially if they develop scratches that can harbor bacteria. If a box still smells after a thorough cleaning, it's time to replace it.

Tip: Scooping and cleaning regularly is the best way to control odors and meet your cat's need for a clean litterbox.



Products to Avoid

Deodorizers may mask smells but won't make the box cleaner, and scented products can irritate your cat. Plastic liners can tear easily, making scooping difficult for you and creating more mess, and can discourage your cat's natural digging if their claws catch the liner.

Keeping the Litterbox a Safe, Positive Space

Cats are always learning, and negative experiences in or around the litterbox can create lasting associations. Avoid and watch for:

- Medical pain (like urinary tract infections, arthritis and pain from being declawed) that can make using the box uncomfortable.
- Startling events near the box, like loud noises or being ambushed by other pets.
- Forcing your cat into the box or punishing them for accidents.

Note: *Punishment for house soiling increases stress and won't solve the underlying problem. Instead, it can cause your cat to fear you and make the issue worse.*

What to Do If Your Cat Isn't Using the Litterbox

Start with a visit to the vet to rule out medical issues. If the problem isn't health-related, ensure your litterboxes meet your cat's preferences for space, cleanliness and comfort. If issues persist, check out our guide on House Soiling in Cats for further troubleshooting.

Additional Resources:

For more information, visit our website: <http://www.edmontonhumanesociety.com>



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