



House Training: Using the Litter Box

DO I NEED TO TRAIN MY NEW KITTEN OR CAT TO USE A LITTER BOX?

Cats by nature use a soil type surface for elimination. By providing a litter box with an appropriate and appealing litter and by confining the newly adopted animal to a small area with a clean box, training can be relatively easy. Because your newly adopted kitten or cat is now in your home environment, that is much larger than a shelter cage, **box training can be lost without proper precautions.**

WHAT CAN I DO TO ENSURE MY NEW KITTEN OR CAT DOESN'T LOSE HER BOX TRAINING?

It is important that the newly adopted animal be confined to a small area (such as a bathroom or kitchen) whenever direct supervision is not available for the first several weeks. Your pet's small area should contain an appropriate sized, clean litter box and other necessities such as food, water, bedding, scratching post and toys. The food and water should be located as far from the litter box as possible. This small confinement area allows you to take advantage of a cat's tendency to eliminate in a loose material without your pet being overwhelmed by such a new large living space (your entire household).

Young kittens will need to eliminate after they eat, after they wake up and after play. At those times place the kitten gently in it's litter box and praise her for elimination. A newly adopted kitten or cat should be supervised to prevent accidents and frequently brought *gently* back to the appropriate elimination location. **When supervision is unavailable, the kitten or cat should be confined to the area containing the clean litter box until a good litter box habit is established.**

WHAT TYPE OF LITTER MATERIAL SHOULD I USE?

There are many types of litter materials available today. These include plain clay litters, fine "clumping" litters, recycled newspapers and many others. Some have materials added to control odor. The most preferred litter by cats is plain, unscented, scoopable litter. Heavy scents or perfumes may actually discourage the cat from using the box. Clay litter does not do a good job at absorbing odors and it is difficult to remove urine material on a daily basis. Avoid using box liners as well. These tend to catch in the cat's claws and will discourage her from digging in the box. Young kittens (under 4 months) should not use a clumping litter. They are curious and might try to eat it, and they could choke on the clumps.

HOW MUCH LITTER SHOULD I PUT IN THE BOX?

Most cats prefer a depth of two to three inches so they can dig. When using clumpable litter, remember to add new material each week as you are depleting the depth each time you clean it. For clay litter, since you are completely dumping the box every other day, the depth should be kept the same at each refilling of the box.

WHAT SIZE AND TYPE OF LITTER BOX SHOULD I BUY?

Initially, the size of the litter box should be determined by the size of the kitten or cat. A very small kitten may need a box with shorter sides for easier access. As the kitten grows, a larger box is appropriate. When finished growing, the cat should have a box that is large enough to easily turn around in. Some owners prefer litter boxes with covers on them. This is acceptable if it is acceptable to the cat. You need to be sure that the cat can negotiate the opening by stepping into it and that the cat is not too large to fit into the opening. Whenever you make a change to the cat's litter box, leave the old box available initially (two to three weeks) until the cat has started using the new box on a regular basis.

WHERE SHOULD I PUT THE LITTERBOX?

There should always be a clean litter box in your pet's small confinement area. Then place another in the area that will be the permanent box site. The permanent litter box should be placed in a location that is easily

accessed by the cat, yet out of the way. Try to avoid congested household areas. The cat should have some privacy and quiet to eliminate. Laundry and furnace rooms are often used, but be sure that noise from household equipment is not disruptive and aversive to your cat. Garages tend to be unfriendly to cats and not easily accessible. Try to put the litter box in an area that is convenient for you to check on and keep clean. Do not put food and water bowls right next to the litter box. If there are dogs in the home, then the litter box should be located where the cat can eliminate without being bothered by them. Plan on always keeping a clean litter box in the house.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD I CLEAN THE LITTER BOX?

One of the most important factors in continued litter box usage by house cats is cleanliness. Cats are very fastidious animals, and spend time each day making sure their entire body is clean. One can assume that they would like a clean place to eliminate. **The box should be cleaned of both fecal and urine material on a DAILY basis.** This is easiest to complete when the litter is scoopable. The litter box itself should be emptied and cleaned every 3-4 days. Remember, each cat is an individual; your cat may like more frequent cleaning of the litter box to maintain good usage patterns. Some cats dislike the odor of the cleansers used to clean litter boxes, so rinse the box thoroughly with hot water after each thorough cleaning.

HOW MANY LITTER BOXES DO I NEED IN MY HOME?

The number of litter boxes needed depends on the number of cats, the size of home, the temperament of the cat, and other pets in the home. When there are multiple cats, multiple pans should be available in different locations, not all side-by-side in one place. The general rule of thumb is one box per cat plus one additional. Because there can be varied interactions between individuals, multiple boxes in multiple locations allow housemates to avoid one another if they so choose. Even for only one cat, two boxes may be appropriate depending on the layout of the home and the individual preferences of the cat. Some cats prefer one box for urine and one for stool. Some physical limitation may prevent a cat from climbing stairs and so a box in the location the cat frequents is needed.

DO I NEED TO WORRY ABOUT THE DIRT IN MY HOUSEPLANTS?

Since cats look for a loose material to eliminate in, it would be very wise if you prevented access to your plants. Try putting foil or river stones at the base of your plants so your pet is unable to dig in the soil. Remember to supervise or confine your newly adopted pet for the first couple of weeks while she is adjusting to your home so accidents are kept to a bare minimum.

WHAT IF MY KITTEN OR CAT DOES NOT USE ITS LITTER BOX?

First, clean up all the areas where the animal has eliminated with an enzyme cleaner (available at pet stores). Do not use vinegar or ammonia. You must provide **constant supervision** whenever the kitten or cat is not confined until you can help your pet establish a proper litter box habit. **Do not use any type of punishment such as rubbing the cat's nose in the elimination, shouting at him, or swatting at him with a newspaper.** These things do not teach your pet anything except to fear you and in fact, they may increase the problem of improper elimination.

Review the steps above. Is the litter box in an area that is appealing and easily accessed by the cat? Is there anything in the area that may be a deterrent? Is the litter box being cleaned often enough? Are there enough litter boxes for the number of cats? To determine the most appealing litter for your cat, offer two or more different litters in the same type of box, side-by-side and see which one, if any, the cat uses most frequently. Next, determine the type of litter box the cat prefers by offering two or more litter box types side-by-side (each with the preferred litter). You can determine the cat's preferred location by offering the preferred litter box with the preferred litter in two or more locations and determining which one, if any, the cat uses more frequently.