



CATS AND LITTER BOXES

The Golden Rules of Problem Prevention

Since you are reading this handout, it is a good bet that you live with a cat or are thinking about adding a new cat to your household. If so, you are among a growing number of people who have discovered the wonderful world of felines as pets. Cats are not difficult to care for as long as you fulfill their requirements for nutritious food, clean water, adequate playtime and an acceptable litter box. This handout will help you set up the “perfect” litter box for your cat – one he will want to use

CATS AND KITTENS ALREADY KNOW

Rule # 1 What a litter box is and how to use it

- This is something cats don’t usually need to be taught.
- Most kittens have an inborn knowledge and are taught by their mothers everything necessary for good litter box habits.
- Even orphaned kittens will use a litter box. Seldom if ever, do owners need to place their kittens in a box and manipulate their feet like they are scratching.
- Generally, if you provide a proper box, they will use it. When kittens have accidents it is often because they are given too much freedom too quickly.



Rule # 2 What type of litter they want

- Kittens develop a preference for types of litter by the time they are three weeks old.
- When given the opportunity, most cats will select their preferred material over any other

EVERY OWNER SHOULD KNOW

Rule # 3 Location is everything

- Place the litter box in an easy to find location. This is very important for kittens
- Place several litter boxes in various locations around the house. Avoid setting litter boxes side by side
- Select an area that is private so the cat won’t be bothered by children or other pets. Baby gates often prevent unwanted intruders.
- Select safe, quiet areas away from scary places. Avoid near a washer, furnace, air conditioner or other loud, noisy items.
- Place the litter box in an area where your cat can see anything or anyone approaching and has an easy escape route. Cats will avoid areas where they have been ambushed, frightened or felt cornered with no way out.
- Place the litter box in one place and LEAVE IT THERE. Don’t constantly move the box.
- Place the litter box away from food and water bowls. If you must place their eating area in the same room as their toilet, provide at least 5 feet between them.



Rule # 4 More is better

- Provide one litter box per cat owned, plus one extra. This ensures that there is always an empty box available. Do not place litter boxes side by side or close to each other
- Provide one litter box for each level of the home. It is important for cats to have easy access to a box. Older and younger cats may have problems reaching a litter box in time.
- Provide a litter box even if you have a cat that goes outside. In bad weather, illness or if you move, it is important that your cat be accustomed to using his own litter box inside the home.

Rule # 5 Size and shape matter

- Big cats require bigger boxes than little cats. For really large cats, owners are encouraged to switch to plastic sweater boxes that provide room for the cat to comfortably turn around and scratch in.
- Small, sick or geriatric cats and kittens may need boxes with shorter sides that are easy to get into or out of.
- Some cats require higher sides to keep their waste confined to the litter box. You can even add a piece of cardboard to redirect urine back into the box.
- Many cats do not like a covered box. Remember, cats need an escape route, like to see others approaching and need room to turn around. It's also easy to forget to clean the litter if you don't see it.



Rule # 6 The name of the game is CLEAN!!!

- Keep the litter box clean! This means scooping at least once a day, and more often if you have an especially fastidious cat. The litter box should never become an outhouse.
- Wash the litter box with a mild cleaner as needed. Avoid strong smelling disinfectants. Your cat's sense of smell is much greater than yours.
- Litter box liners can be helpful, but some cats don't like them. Try placing a liner in one box and leaving the other box without. Your cat will decide which he prefers.
- Plastic absorbs odors, even if kept clean and should periodically be replaced. Replace the litter box at least once every six months.
- Self-cleaning litter boxes can be great for very busy or forgetful owners. They are more expensive and can take time to introduce to your cat, but many owners (and cats) are happy with them. Research brands to find one that best meets your needs.
- If your cat tracks litter when exiting the box you might consider using a non-tracking litter or placing a mat in front of the litter box.



Rule # 7 What's inside counts

- Don't change brands of kitty litter just to save money. If your cat is already doing well using a certain type of litter already, stick with it.
- Avoid using a scented litter just to make it smell better. Your cat has a better sense of smell than you do. He may not want his box to smell like flowers. Important: A clean box should never smell!
- Use the recommended depth of litter for your cat. Most cats don't like to feel as if they are sinking into quicksand.
- If you are not sure about what type of litter to buy, try using soft clumping litter. Studies have shown that most cats prefer litter made of smaller particles that are softer on the cat's feet.

The above guidelines discuss the most common behavioral reasons cats develop litter box problems. However, if your fastidious feline suddenly stops using the litter box, it is important to first schedule a visit with your cat's veterinarian so he can examine your cat and rule out a medical cause for the problem.