



Animal Alliances, LLC
Companion Animal Behavior Services

Cats & Their Litter Boxes

The best thing about cats is that they don't need to be potty-trained. Relieving themselves in soft, loose material and burying their waste is an innate behavior, so even young kittens know what to do without being shown. All you have to do is provide an acceptable place for the cat to do her business. To start out on the right foot with your new cat or kitten we have a few suggestions:

Where should you put the litter box?

The litter box should be located in a place that provides the cat with some amount of privacy but that is convenient for her to get to. It may be desirable to you to put the litter box in the basement but your cat may find the basement unacceptable. A small kitten may not be able to climb down the stairs, or the floor may be too cold to walk on. Additionally, basements house a variety of giant noise-making monsters like the furnace, washer, and dryer. If a cat is frightened by the noise of one of these appliances while she is using her litter box, she may not want to return to that location to eliminate.

What kind of litter box should you use?

A standard plastic litter box is preferred by most cats. If you have a kitten, make sure the sides are not too high for her to get into the box. Be careful of using covered litter boxes. While some cats prefer the privacy, they must be cleaned more frequently because odors get trapped inside. A covered box that is not cleaned often quickly becomes unacceptable to most cats. Some cats don't mind a liner in the box, but others do. Experiment with two boxes, one with and one without the liner to see how your cat feels about them.

What kind of litter should you use?

Most cats prefer fine-grained, soft substrates for elimination, so the clumping litters or dust-free small grained clay litters are most acceptable. Usually the pellet-type litters or those that are scented are unacceptable to cats. Find the type of litter your cat prefers by giving her a choice of two or three different litter boxes containing different litters. Once you find what type of litter she likes, stick with it.

Do not put more than 2 inches of litter in the box. Cats do not like to sink into their toilet area.

How many litter boxes should you have?

If you have multiple cats, you should have multiple boxes in multiple locations in the house. A good rule of thumb is one box per cat plus one. Do not put them all in the same room as this essentially creates one toilet area, not several.

How often should you clean the litter box?

You must keep the litter box consistently clean to meet the needs of most cats. Scoop the feces out every day and totally change the litter at least twice a week. Do not use strong smelling cleaning products to wash out the box. The residual smell may cause your cat to avoid the box. It is sufficient to wash out the box with soap and water at each changing.

What does it mean if your cat stops using the litter box?

The first thing to consider is taking the cat to the veterinarian. It may be a medical condition causing your cat to eliminate outside the box. If the veterinarian does not find a medical problem, consider behavioral causes. Did you recently change litter brands? Did you move the box location? Are you cleaning the box often enough? Did something scare the cat when she was using the litter box? Is there unrest between the family cats? There are many reasons why cats stop using their litter boxes. Do a little detective work to try to figure out what is going on.