

# Cats, Litter & Litter Boxes

As cats have moved indoors, no aspect of the feline-human bond is more consequential than the litter box. Good litter box behavior is also a matter of survival – the top reason cats are surrendered to animal shelters is failure to use the box. Odor control, expense, ease of use, and disposal are the most important factors to consider when choosing litter and supplies.

## Kinds of Litter

- **Pelleted Litters** – The original cat litters, they are the least expensive, need to be changed most frequently, and have the poorest odor control. Solid waste can be scooped out daily, but when urine odor builds up, all the litter must be thrown out and replaced, usually once a week. On the positive side, used pellets can be composted. Special sifting boxes allow urine-soaked pellets that have turned into sawdust to be separated from the clean pellets and removed.
  - Examples: Feline Pine (pine), Cat Works (cellulose fiber), Mountain Cat (cedar), Cat Country Elite (wheat grass pellets), CareFresh (soft paper based pellets)
- **Clay Clumping Litters** – Invented in the 1980's clumping litters revolutionized the cat world, quickly becoming the most widely used litter. They're more expensive than pellets, but less is used. Both solid wastes and urine clump and can be scooped and thrown away daily, leaving only clean litter in the box. Top off with small amounts of litter to replace what gets scooped out. Change entire contents every six months or so. Benefits are better odor control and greater ease of use than pellets. Drawbacks are more dust and tracking, and a very small danger of intestinal blockage if the granules ingested during grooming clump together in the intestine. For this reason, they are not recommended for kittens.
  - Examples: Integrity, EverClean, and Dr. Esley's Cat Attract (with special scent attractants for problem situations)
- **"Alternative" Clumping Flushable Litters** – The best sellers are made from renewable, biodegradable plant sources such as corn, wheat and wood. They combine the best qualities of plant based pellets and clay clumping litters. Though more expensive, they have the best odor control due to the naturally occurring plant enzymes. An important benefit is that, unlike clay, clumps are guaranteed flushable without harming plumbing. Placing the box in a bathroom makes daily scooping a 30 second chore.
  - Examples: World's Best (corn), Swheat Scoop (wheat), Feline Pine Scoopable (pine)

## The Litter Box

- **What kind of box?** Bigger is better, ideally one and a half times longer than your cat. We like deep boxes with high sides so less litter is scattered by digging. Uncovered boxes make it easier to scoop frequently, but if you choose a covered litter box for reasons of aesthetics, privacy, or curious dogs, be sure there is sufficient headroom to accommodate your cat's upright body position while squatting. Kittens and older cats need a box that's easy to step into, with a low side or cutout for entry.
- **How many boxes?** Experts recommend one per cat. Multiple cats need sufficient space not to step on clumps and waste. Kittens produce more waste than adults for their size, and have stinkier stools. It's a good idea to replace the box itself every six to twelve months. Cats have sensitive noses and may avoid a box with a residual odor.

- **Where should you put a litter box?** Litter boxes need to be placed where your cat can and will use it. Place the litter box in a quiet, low traffic area that is easily accessible.
- **Mat & Liners?** Mats help clean the paws when leaving the box, thereby reducing tracking. Today's mats are very pretty. Liners aren't necessary at all, but some people use them with pelleted litters to help with disposal. However, many cats don't like the feel of the plastic liner when they scratch and bury.

## Troubleshooting

### What to do if the cat stops using the box?

1. **First and foremost, ask your vet to rule out a serious health problem** caused by crystals in the urine. This can lead to a life-threatening emergency if the crystals create a complete blockage.
2. **Is the box clean?** Cats hate dirty boxes. Try using all new litter. Next try a brand new box.
3. Has anything changed with the litter box? Cats are creatures of habit. A new location, different kind of litter, rearranging the furniture around it, etc..., can throw them off. If your cat's using the same spot over and over, try putting his box there, then very gradually move it to a more convenient place.
4. **Is there a new dynamic in the household?** Cats respond poorly to change. Is there a new cat? A new baby? Is there litter box guarding? New roommates? Even a new litter mat with an unpleasant feel can stress your cat out. Check your cat's access to his box. An additional box may be the answer.

### Things you can use to correct litter box behavior:

1. Try drawing your cat back to his litter box with Dr. Esley's Cat Attract, a clay clumping litter with scent attractants that has been effective in solving litter box problems.
2. Clean up any accidents with a quality enzymatic cleaner. Remove the odors that will lure your cat back to those inappropriate places he's soiled with Petastick, a great enzymatic odor and stain remover that dissolves the source of odor and stains from carpets, floors, bedding and clothing.
3. Give your cat a sense of well-being with Comfort Zone Spray or Plug-in. Comfort Zone is a patented synthetic version of the pheromones cats use to mark their territory by rubbing their cheeks against something. Diffusing this scent (which is odorless to humans) in your cat's environment can work wonders on stress levels and reduce destructive behaviors.
4. Increase the amount and/or the variety of food.

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