Frequently Asked Questions about Feline Litter Boxes and Cat Litter

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Unlike many pets, cats and kittens arrive in your home with few stipulations. They crave a high-quality food, seek a safe, stimulating environment, and cuddle up to lots of love. Of course, consistent veterinary care and a few sunlit window perches in which to snooze are also important. But the one thing that every indoor cat or kitten needs is a clean feline litter box and suitable litter.

Oftentimes, however, very little thought is given to litter pans and litter. Each is, after all, an expected necessity of cat companionship. But your cat's sanitation needs can lead to some interesting questions. In fact, elimination disorders are the most common reason cats are given up to shelters and one of the most common problems for which people seek veterinary advice. However, with a little understanding and patience most cat owners and cats overcome any issues they have with litter boxes. Below are the six most common questions we receive about cat litter boxes, kitty litter, and feline sanitation accessories.

- What is the best litter to use?

Convenient Litter Disposal

Looking for a safe, sanitary way to dispose of litter box waste? Traditionally, people flushed litter or used it as garden compost. But even "flushable" litters can damage your bathroom or septic system plumbing. Similarly, dumping cat litter in your garden is unsanitary, attracts insects and feral cats, and renders

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- How do I teach my new kitten to use the litter box?
- What is the best way to control litter box odors?
- Why has my cat stopped using her litter box?
- What is the best way to relocate my cat's litter box?
- How many litter boxes should I have, and what are the best kind?

homegrown vegetables or fruits inedible. Instead, use the Litter Champ Disposal System to automatically and completely seal away waste and odor in convenient biodegradable bags you then toss out with the trash.

What is the best litter to use?

The best cat litters are made from natural, nontoxic ingredients. Studies have shown that most cats prefer litters that most resemble beach sand and unscented clumpable litters.

We suggest you not change litters unless your cat is not using the litter box. Cats can be notoriously finicky, especially when it comes to change. Similar to moving a litter box location, changing litter types can cause your kitten a wealth of stress. If you must change feline litter types or brands, however, we recommend slowly adding small amounts of the new litter to the litter you currently use. Gradually, over a few weeks, increase the amount of new litter you mix with the old litter until you've completely changed over to your new chosen litter. If your cat refuses to use the litter box at any time, however, it is best to stop the conversion process and, if necessary, revert back to the original litter.

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How do I teach my new kitten to use the litter box?

Kittens typically learn to use a litter box at three or four weeks of age. In fact, most mother cats teach their kittens how to use litter boxes, which strengthens the kitten's natural instinct to eliminate in sand or soil. As a result, you should not have to train your kitten to use the litter box. You will, however, need to show your new kitten where her litter box is located. To encourage proper usage, all litter boxes in your house should be easily accessible and offer privacy during use. Hooded litter boxes can help create the sanitation sanctuary your cat desires.

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What is the best way to control litter box odors?

Scrupulously clean litter boxes have no smell. There are odor absorbing gels and odor control spray powders to help eliminate odors in and around your cat's litter boxes. However, the best and healthiest way to control litter box odors is to keep it clean. This entails daily scooping of urine and waste clumps and at least weekly changing of the entire litter contents and any litter pan liners. Litter boxes should be washed weekly as well. You can simplify litter box cleaning with an automatic litter box. These rake away waste periodically throughout the day, often just a few minutes after your cat exits the litter pan.

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Why has my cat stopped using her litter box?

Cats are extremely clean animals. Most would never choose to eliminate outside their litter box. Therefore, a cat who stops using her litter box is reason for concern and should be seen by a veterinarian. Possible causes for this inappropriate elimination include:

- Medical Conditions such as diabetes, hyperthyroidism, kidney or liver disease, and feline lower urinary tract disease (FLUTD), or internal parasites (intestinal worms). See your veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment.
- Stress caused by events such as moving, changes in daily routines, an addition to the family (human or animal), and more. Consider using stress control treats or sprays to help calm your anxious cat.
- Substrate Changes between clumping litter, sand, newspaper, or other materials. The smell of "perfumed" or "antiseptic" litters may also discourage use.
- Litter Box Location too close to your cat's food or water or in high-traffic areas. Place additional litter boxes around your home to help meet your cat's needs.
- Sanitary Conditions of the litter box, litter, and area surrounding the litter pan. Use an automatic litter box to ease waste removal and a litter mat to help reduce litter scatter outside the pan as your cat enters and exits.

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What is the best way to relocate my cat's litter box?

Unless unavoidable, it is best to keep your cat's litter box in the same location. However, if you only have one litter box and need to relocate it, the following might help minimize stress to your cat. First, place a second, new litter box in your desired location without removing the original box. Place your cat in the new litter box and, if possible, rake her paws in the litter a few times. Allow your cat to use both litter boxes for a time. Eventually, you may be able to remove the old litter box. Another option is to slowly move your original litter box in small increments - just a few inches every day - over a period.

However, if your cat eliminates in the location of the original litter box, do not scold her. After all, you initiated this location change. Instead, again show her the location of her new litter box. Use a Pet Odor Remover to remove any stains and urine pheromones, which may otherwise cause your cat to eliminate in the same location again. If necessary, return the litter box to its original location.

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How many litter boxes should I have, and what are the best kind?

It is best to keep at least one more litter box than the number of cats in your home to encourage proper litter box usage. For kittens and older cats, always have a litter box on the level of your house where the cat spends most of her time. If your house has multiple stories, we suggest having at least one litter box on each story.

Generally, the bigger the better. Cats prefer being able to comfortably jump in and move around in the litter box. Ease of entry and plenty of room are especially important for older cats who may be arthritic. Kittens, too, may need litter boxes with lower sides.

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