The best cat toys spark a cat’s natural hunting instincts and withstand daily bunny kicks, chewing, clawing, and licking without compromising safety. Playing with toys helps kittens learn about the world, prevents frisky felines from getting into trouble, and keeps cats of all ages—including seniors—engaged and active.

Why Are Toys Important for Cats?

Toys benefit cats in many ways, including:

* **Teaching Kittens Appropriate Play**: Kittens often explore the world through their mouth, including by gently biting your hands, fingers, and even feet. It’s important to guide kittens, as well as adult cats that have a biting habit, toward more appropriate surfaces for their natural behaviors. If a cat is playfully biting your hand, make your hand go limp so it’s no longer wiggling around or exciting to them. Then slowly and calmly move your hand away from your cat and provide a toy in its place. Once your cat or kitten has redirected their attack to the toy, reward them with praise or a treat.
* **Preventing Boredom:** If a cat doesn’t have much to do, they’ll end up bored and try to find ways to occupy themselves. Whether it’s scratching the furniture, batting at houseplants, knocking items off of countertops, or meowing for attention, it’s safe to say you might not always appreciate your cat’s chosen activities.
* **Easing Tension in Multi-Cat Households:** If your cats aren’t getting along, try using toys to redirect tension. Establishing routines of interactive play distracts cats from potential conflicts, redirecting their focus to positive activities. Ending the play session with a treat, snack, or meal will have everyone forgetting about their troubles and winding down for a peaceful catnap.
* **Bonding With Your Cat:** Perhaps most important of all, playing with your cat creates positive interactions, fostering a strong bond between you and your beloved cat.

Tips for Buying Cat Toys

What makes a cat toy great? Here are a few important factors to consider before buying.

* **Choose Visually Stimulating Cat Toys:** Consider options that look and move like real prey or have small objects that appear and disappear from under fabric or within a hole or tunnel. While colors are less important, cats may be able to see blue and yellow toys the best.
* **Offer Enticing Scents:** Not all cats will respond to the stimulating scents of catnip and silvervine. But for those that do, the plants can trigger reactions of affection, relaxation, happiness, or playfulness.
* **Opt for Rechargeable Cat Toys:** Electronic toys can be a good option for cats because many are motion-activated, providing entertainment even when you’re not at home or if you’re busy in another room. Choosing a toy that is rechargeable adds to its longevity and convenience.

Popular Cat Toys

A cat’s interest in toys can naturally wane over time. To keep playtime engaging, stock up on different types of cat toys and rotate them in and out of play.

* **Motion-Activated Toys:** Motion-activated toys replicate realistic prey-like movements. They serve as an excellent alternative when you can’t be on the other end of a wand.
* **Wand Toys:** Once you discover your cat’s play or prey preferences, fully engage and embrace a bit of silliness. Imitate the movements of prey using wand toys. If your cat really revs up for prey that flies and flutters rather than crawls and skitters, you can easily purchase replacement feather, mice, or worm attachments.
* **Fabric Dancers:** The simple, yet effective design of fabric toys mimics the unpredictable movements of prey such as bugs. The colorful, twirling ribbon allows it to dance through the air or skitter on the ground.
* **Catnip Kickers:** Kickers are perfect for cats who like to lie on their side while gnawing, biting, and kicking their toys. Typically plush and stuffed with catnip leaves and flowers, they elicit playful enthusiasm in felines who are captivated by the enticing aroma.
* **Play and Foraging Mats:** Cats are naturally drawn to toys with holes, cubbies, or tunnels, providing an alluring environment for both play and safe relaxation. Specially designed cat play mats offer an ideal space for hiding toy mice, weaving wand toys throughout, and concealing treats for engaging foraging activities.
* **Puzzle Feeders:** Turn mealtime into a captivating hunt with puzzle feeders. These functional toys challenge your cat to outsmart their “prey,” reduce boredom, and slow down fast eaters.
* **Scratchers and Scratching Posts:** Scratching is a natural behavior for cats, so you’ll want to offer plenty of appropriate surfaces where your cat can flex their claws. Cats have unique scratching styles, including their preferred scratching direction (such as vertical or horizontal) and material (like sisal rope, cardboard, or carpet), so you may want to offer more than one option.

Cat Toy Safety Considerations

When you’re shopping for toys for your cat, consider durability. You don’t want a toy with small pieces that could easily break off and become a choking hazard if ingested. While toys with strings or wires are great for interactive play, ensure they’re put away when you’re done playing with your cat to prevent your cat from getting tangled up. Consider size, too. Toys should be larger than a quarter to prevent choking hazards. A cat’s hook-like tongue can get caught on a small toy, which can lead to accidental ingestion.

If your cat has a fleeting interest in toys or you’re still exploring their play preferences, making your own toys can be a cost-effective and eco-friendly option, though they may not be as durable as store-bought ones. Try crafting engaging feed puzzles using common items like empty toilet paper rolls and egg cartons.

Keep in mind that safety is paramount, so always supervise your cat during playtime with any toys to ensure they remain secure and free from potential hazards. Engaging in safe and stimulating play not only brings joy to your feline companion, but it also contributes to their overall well-being, promoting a long, happy, and healthy life.