

Litter Box Care Guidelines

Kelly A. St. Denis, DVM, MS, DABVP

Date Published: 04/07/2016

House-soiling, inappropriate urination/defecation, spraying. A cat's use of locations other than the litter box comes under many names. Why do our cats do this? First and foremost, it is critical to ensure that there is no medical component to the behavior. Urinary tract-related disease can lead to death in less than 48 hours. The diseases are painful and debilitating

Consult your veterinarian IMMEDIATELY if house-soiling commences. Waiting to see what happens could mean the difference between life and death. Once your veterinarian assesses the cat for health problems, discussions about diets and behavioral problems can follow.

Many times, the veterinarian will identify multiple factors contributing to the problem, including medical, diet and behavioral problems. We are here to work with you and your cat to resolve these concerns.



Photo courtesy of Depositphotos

Litter-Box Care

Location Location Location

Provide more than one location in the household for litter boxes. Consider having one on each floor if space allows. Avoid moving boxes around.

Depth Matters

Experiment with different depths of litter. Most cats prefer 1-1.5 inch depth while others may prefer deeper litter. Add a new litter box if attempting to try different litter depths (or types). Try not to alternate the litter depth or type within existing litter boxes. Take note of which litter boxes get used the most and choose that depth of litter for the majority of the boxes.

Negative Associations

Keep litter boxes away from rooms that contain noisy equipment such as furnaces or washing machines. The noises may frighten the cat. Avoid administering medications or doing anything unpleasant to your cat while they are in the litter box or litter box area.

Don't Soil Where You Eat

Keep food and water dishes in a separate room or more than 5 feet away from the litter boxes. Cats are fastidious by nature and do not favor a soiled box. In the wild, they have endless location options in which to do their business. How can we expect them to walk in a pile of old feces and urine clumps?

Litter-Box Criteria

Feline behavior specialists have comprised a list of litter-box criteria based on studies demonstrating what is preferable to cats:

Number of Boxes

Provide one litter box per household cat PLUS one additional box. For example, a household with three cats should have four litter boxes.

Scented or Unscented

Use unscented clumping litter. Most cats prefer this texture best next to sandbox sand. Scented litters can be unpleasant and even painful to cats, since their sense of smell is significantly more sensitive than a human's.

Clay Versus Other

While some cats will tolerate some of the newer 'natural' types of litters (corn, wheat, etc.), they are generally not preferred and will not be tolerated in instances where the cat is unwell or experiencing anxiety/stress.

Size Matters

Provide large size litter boxes that the cats are comfortable moving around in. Some older, arthritic cats may prefer boxes with LOW walls or a low door cut in the box. Climbing over the high walls may be painful.

Keep it Open

Remove covers from most or all of the litter boxes. Most cats do not feel comfortable in a covered box.

Keep it Clean

Scoop litter once to twice daily. More often is best. Empty out the litter tray once every one to two weeks. Clean the litter box with a mild detergent, rinse well, and dry well before adding new litter.

URL: <https://veterinarypartner.vin.com/doc/?id=7282660&pid=192393cf98238-070b-492d-9fb8-2a03455d9f55.1660133773>

The content of this site is owned by Veterinary Information Network (VIN®), and its reproduction and distribution may only be done with VIN®'s express permission.

The information contained here is for general purposes only and is not a substitute for advice from your veterinarian. Any reliance you place on such information is strictly at your own risk.

Links to non-VIN websites do not imply a recommendation or endorsement by VIN® of the views or content contained within those sites.