

## Your New Cat and the Litter Box: Start Off Right!

Most cats have specific preferences about pretty much everything related to their litter boxes. Each cat is different! By following these suggestions and learning about your cat's preferences, you'll be able to keep your new cat happy and using her litter boxes.

Cats are generally fastidious with their litter box hygiene habits. It serves us and our cats well when we keep them happy and using their litter boxes each and every time.

### Litter Box Considerations:

**Placement:** The litter box should be kept in a location that gives your cat some privacy and is also conveniently located, *for your cat*. If she spends most of her time upstairs in your bedroom, then that floor must have a litter box.

Some new cat owners are inclined to place the litter box in an out-of-the-way spot in order to minimize odor and loose particles of cat litter in the house. Often, the litter box ends up in the basement, sometimes next to an appliance and/or on a cold cement floor. This type of location can be undesirable from your cat's point of view for several reasons:

- If you have a kitten or an older cat, she may not be able to get down a flight of stairs in time to get to the box.
- Since she is new to the home, she may not remember where the litter box is, especially if it's located in an area she seldom visits.
- If your cat likes to scratch the surface surrounding her litter box, she may find a cold, cement floor unappealing.
- If the furnace, washer or dryer kicks on while your cat is using the box, she may get startled – and won't risk repeating that frightening experience!

**Type of Litter:** Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained, unscented litter. Once you find a litter your cat likes, don't change types or brands. Buying whatever brand happens to be on sale could result in her not using the litter box. It's not worth it.

**Depth of Litter:** This depends completely on what your individual cat has gotten used to. Begin with a depth of two inches and pay attention to her interest in digging into and using her litter box. Some longhaired cats may prefer less litter and a smooth, slick surface, such as the litter box with just a paper towel lining the bottom.

**Linners:** Some cats don't mind having a liner in the litter box, but the majority of cats do. Again, you may want to experiment to see if your cat is bothered by a liner in the box. If you do use a liner, make sure it's anchored in place, so it can't easily catch your cat's claws or be pulled out of place.

**Size of Box:** Your cat needs sufficient room to turn around, scratch, dig or assume any position she wants. Oversized sweater containers are very large and make cats very happy. Your cat needs to be able to easily jump into and out of the litter box. You will need to accommodate accordingly as your cat ages.

**Number of Boxes:** You should have as many litter boxes as you have cats, plus one extra. You don't ever want one of your cats to be prevented from eliminating in the litter box because it's already occupied. You might consider placing them in several locations around the house. We also recommend that you place at least one litter box on each level of your house. Providing cats with multiple litter box options is crucial.

**Covered or Not:** Many people prefer to use a covered litter box; however, there are potential problems with using a covered box. Potential problems with covered litter boxes:

- You may forget to clean the litter box as frequently as you should since the dirty litter is “out of sight, out of mind.”
- A covered litter box traps odors inside, so it will need to be cleaned *more* often than an open one.
- A covered litter box may not allow a large cat sufficient room.
- A covered litter box can create an “ambush” opportunity by another cat as the user exits the box.

On the other hand, a covered litter box may feel more private and may be preferred by some cats. Experiment by offering both types at first, to see what your cat prefers.

## **Cleaning the Litter Box**

To meet the needs of the most discriminating cat, the litter box should be scooped daily – at the very least. How often you change the litter depends on the number of cats you have, the number of boxes, and the type of litter you use. If you notice an odor, or if much of the litter is wet or clumped, it’s time for a change. Don’t use strong smelling chemicals or cleaning products when washing the box, as it may cause your cat to avoid it. Washing with soap and water should be all that’s required.

## **“Litter-Training” Cats**

There’s no such thing as “litter-training” a cat in the same way one would house train a dog. A cat doesn’t need to be taught what to do with a litter box. The only thing you need to do is provide an acceptable, accessible and large enough litter box.

## **If Problems Develop**

If your cat begins to eliminate in areas other than the litter box, your first call should always be to your veterinarian. Many medical conditions can cause a change in a cat’s litter box habits. If your veterinarian determines that your cat is healthy, the cause might be behavioral. Most litter box behavior problems can be resolved by using behavior modification techniques. Punishment is never the answer, no matter how frustrated you become.

**Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.**