

Remember When... ?

Today's cats benefit from advances in all segments of the pet product industry, from toys to food, litter to vitamins.

Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

A Litter TipThen: Fluffy did her business in a little plastic box filled with absorbent dirt or clay. There was basically dirt in a bag. That's what you got, says Robert Vetere, executive vice president of the American Pet Products Manufacturers Association (APPMA), a Greenwich, Conn.-based trade organization serving pet product manufacturers. You put it in the box and your cat used it.

Now: Clumping clay litter hit the scene in the mid-1980s, and about 15 years later, the floodgates opened. Litter materials now include pelleted wood and paper, grains, corn cobs, walnut husks and silica crystals, to name a few. Fragrances control odor and pheromones attract hesitant cats. Some litters even signal if your cat is ill.

Now, between fragrances, clumpable and scooping litters, alternative litters and goodness knows what else, litter is become something that doesn't smell like litter any more, Vetere says.

The box itself has come a long way, too. Fluffys little plastic pan has transformed into a covered hideaway with a charcoal filter and carpeted ramp. She can use an automatic litterbox that cleans itself. She can even learn to use the toilet, and that was unheard of 40 years ago, Thompson says.

Scratch on ThisThen: Fluffy sharpened her claws on folded cardboard or an old tree limb.

Now: Cardboard scratchers still sit on pet store shelves, but now they're joined by sisal-covered surfaces that resemble real-life tree limbs and carpeted cat condos that blend into a homes dcor.

People color coordinate them with the room in the house that they're going to be in, Thompson says. I've heard the wife saying to her husband, This will go great in the family room, or This will be a nice accent piece. Some of those items have literally turned into furniture.