

Remember When... ?

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

Wendy Bedwell-Wilson

Cat products have come a long way since 1965. Four decades ago, cat owners had few choices when it came to their pets toys, food and accessories. Today, full-service pet stores dedicate aisles to our feline friends. Cat-specialty retailers are popping up across the country. And the products they offer continue to multiply. Travel back with CAT FANCY as we muse over products then and now.

Toys Aplenty Then: A catnip-stuffed swatch of felt with pieces of string for whiskers, a balled up piece of foil or a dust bunny from under the couch sufficed as Fluffys playthings.

Now: The skys the limit, says Donna Jean Thompson, a Manassas, Va.-based cat breeder and fancier for 41 years. We entertain our cats with zany glitter balls, cloth mice and wand toys in dozens of styles, shapes and materials. Refillable pouches can be stuffed with the freshest top-grade catnip. Fluffy can play for hours with her battery-operated feather wand that's attached to an oversized cheddar-colored mouse.

Cats never had those things, Thompson says. If they wanted a ball, they'd find a golf ball or a tennis ball or something around the house.

A Growing MenuThen: Cat owners fed either homemade diets of fresh meat or cat food sold at the grocery store.

Now: Cat foods range from age-specific to breed-specific to ailment-specific and everything in between. Owners no longer need to mix their own formulas; food companies have veterinarians on staff to ensure that the flavors are palatable, the nutrition is top-notch and the varieties are virtually limitless.

We have 15 to 20 different brands of food, says John Braxton, co-owner of Braxtons Animal Works, a pet retailer in Wayne, Pa., that's been operating since 1938. And not to mention all the formulas within those brands adult, light, senior, kitten they just keep going.