

Cat Doesn't Use Litterbox

CatChannel expert Jeanne Adlon, professional cat sitter, explains some causes of litterbox problems.

By Jeanne Adlon

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Q: My cat doesn't always use the litterbox. What should I do?

A: Unfortunately, I have heard that this is the No. 1 reason why cats are given up by their owners, but it doesn't have to come to that. I do have some suggestions for you, but first, I'll share an amusing litterbox story.

I once had a client whose cat Sally was a very sweet tabby. However, Sally's litterbox was filled with facial tissues instead of litter. As per my client's instruction, when I came to care for Sally, I was to clean out her box and then carefully stack new tissues all around the inside, creating a fluffy, cloud-like effect. My guess was that Sally's owner did not want dust and litter scattered around, and Sally probably had fussy bathroom habits. This was a peculiar and expensive solution, particularly since there are many types of affordable litter available. These include scented and unscented, clay, wheat, wood fiber, pine, corn and more. I would guess one is suitable for even the fussiest cat.

If your kitty stops using her box, try a new litter, but make the change slowly. Mix some old litter with the new for a few days and then use just the new. Check the condition of the litterbox. It's a good idea to replace it every year since odor and bacteria can seep into the scratches made by digging. Cats have very sensitive noses.

Litterboxes come in all sizes and shapes, covered and uncovered (mine love a round box). Make sure it is roomy enough for your cat to turn around in, and put it in a quiet and accessible spot. When introducing a new box, put some litter from the old box inside so it has a familiar scent. I don't recommend trying a new box and new litter at the same time, however.

Also, scoop out the box daily, and keep it clean. I have seen cats wait patiently while I clean out a box and then leap in to enjoy a fresh bathroom. Sometimes bad litterbox behaviors have simple solutions, but if this behavior continues, please visit your veterinarian. As always, I encourage you to comment and share your stories.