

## How Can I Keep My Cats Off the Counters?

**CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger offers strategies to keep kitties from counter-surfing.**

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**Q:** I have two 7-month-old kitties. They repeatedly jump on the kitchen counters and table. I can't get them to stop. We have tried spraying them with water, but they think this is playing. We have a lot of toys for them to play with and give them a lot of attention and love. What do you suggest we do?

**A:** Cats counter-surf for a variety of reasons. A primary motivator is food. Cats love to help clean the dishes or find those stray scraps of food in the sink or on the counter. Cats also love to be up high, and counters are perfect for checking out the room and for demonstrating their place in the cat hierarchy. Countertops also provide opportunities for cats to share more time and space with their favorite people.

Convincing cats that countertops aren't their own personal highways and hang-out spots takes a combination of management and behavior modification. One of the most challenging parts of the equation is changing the habits of family members so they will bus their dishes and clean off the counters. The next step is making the counters uninviting for the cats while simultaneously providing more appealing places to loiter on. I do not recommend products that startle or scare cats with noises or air because they can trigger fear behaviors and redirected aggressions. Instead, cover cheap plastic placemats with StickyPaws, a double-sided tape, and put the placemats on the countertops. Cats do not like the feel of the double-sided tape on their paws. Items can also be placed on the counters, blocking the cats so they don't have comfortable places to stand or sit. At the same time, provide the kitties with tall stools or cat trees placed near the counters, which will satisfy their counter-surfing urges. With the help of clicker training, the cats can be encouraged to sit on the stools or on other tall locations next to the kitchen counters.

After learning the basics of clicker training and making sure the counters are not appealing places for the kittens, clicker train them on the stools. Train the kitties to sit and stay on the stools, rewarding them with something yummy and motivating when they perform the behaviors. Other fun behaviors that you can teach them include shaking hands, high fives and sitting pretty, as well as dozens of other tricks. With a little work and patience, the stools will become the hang-out spots, preferable to the counters.