

Top 10 Litterbox Tips

Follow these tips to help your cat avoid litterbox problems.

By Helen Jablonski

Frequent litterbox cleaning is an important part of proper cat care. Peeing outside the box. It's the most common litterbox problem veterinarians and behaviorists encounter, but one that easily can be avoided.

To keep your cat's litterbox behavior problem-free, follow these 10 litterbox tips.

1. Keep it clean.

No one — especially cats with their ultra-sensitive sense of smell — likes a dirty, stinky bathroom. Scoop out your cat's litterbox daily, and change the litter weekly.

2. But not too clean

Stay away from harsh cleaning chemicals like bleach, pine or citrus cleaners, which can leave a scent in the box your cat won't like. Simply wash the litterbox with hot, soapy water and rinse well.

3. If it works, don't fix it.

A sale on cat litter is a common reason to switch litter brands. Unfortunately, this can trigger litterbox problems. Cats want litter that smells and feels familiar. Thus, if your cat likes his litter, don't change it.

4. Something old, something new

Some cats don't like new litter because it doesn't have their smell. For these finicky felines, sprinkle some old litter on top of the new. This reassures your cat that the bathroom is indeed his.

5. One for each cat, plus one

Another common mistake is having too few litterboxes. Experts recommend one litterbox per cat, plus one more. That means a household with three cats needs four litterboxes.

6. Spread 'em.

To a cat, two litterboxes next to each other equals one big box. Put litterboxes in different areas of the house, with at least one on each floor.

7. Peace and quiet

If your cat gets startled by a thumping washing machine or rambunctious kids while using the litterbox, she will quickly find a more peaceful place to go. Give your cat quiet bathrooms away from noisy, high traffic areas.

8. Privacy, please

Cats like their privacy, but that doesn't mean you should hide their litterboxes. Choosing a location where kitty can see who is approaching is important, especially in multi-cat homes where a dominant cat might try to ambush another cat using the box. This is also a prime example of why cats sharing a home need extra boxes.

9. Ditch the hood.

Although you might like to keep it covered, most cats don't care for hooded litterboxes. Covers keep odors in and don't allow kitty to keep an eye on the surroundings while taking care of business.

10. Plain and simple

Whether you use clay litter or a natural product like wheat, corn or recycled newspaper, stay away from perfumes and fragrances. These unnatural scents are added to make litter appealing to people, not to cats.

"Cats are attracted to areas where there's some residual odor of urine or feces," says Benjamin Hart, a veterinary behaviorist. "They go back to that area because it smells like a toilet area, so it's kind of an attractive place."

If you follow these guidelines, your cat's litterbox will be that attractive place. You'll say goodbye to litterbox problems and hello to a happy, well-trained cat.



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