

RESEARCH PROVIDES TIPS FOR LITTER BOX SUCCESS

What's the best way to ensure cats use the litter box regularly? Give them a bathroom they like! If you consider how you feel about having to use dirty, noisy, or cramped public restrooms, it is easy to understand that your cats have their own preferences, too.

Research* shows that most cats prefer a large litter tray that is easy to enter and exit, with a non-scented clumping litter at a depth of 1 to 3 inches. Of scented litters, cedar scent was the most attractive. Citrus and floral were least popular.

Clumping litter is preferred by most adult cats because of its texture, but cats are less likely to use a box with clumps left in it. Therefore, regular daily scooping is essential to making the box attractive to your cat.

For kittens and long-haired cats, a non-clumping litter may be a better choice. Clumping litter may stick to inquisitive kittens who play in litter, and cats with longer fur may end up with litter clumping around their genital area. Check regularly for this potential.

It is best to provide multiple boxes in a home, even for a single cat. The recommended equation is:

1 box per cat in a household, PLUS 1.

A single cat will appreciate an extra box for those days you don't scoop immediately or in case the cat is at the far end of the home from the primary box. With two cats, offer three boxes. For five cats, you will need six boxes. In a large home with multiple floors, it is wise to provide at least one box per floor. No one likes to be far away from a toilet area when the urge to go happens.

While we may want to hide litter boxes away from our living areas, our cats feel exactly the opposite. They want safe and easy access to their toileting area. If there is any tension between cats in a household, it becomes especially important that each cat can get to a litterbox without being intimidated or chased by another cat or others. In a similar way, be sure doors cannot be accidentally left closed, blocking access. Some cats may be uncomfortable with items stored above the litter box. Placing the box in an open area removes that concern for your cat.

Older or obese cats or any cat with balance or coordination problems needs consideration. If your cat shows any difficulty entering or exiting the box, you can use tools to lower a portion of one side of the box to allow easier access. In order to provide a large enough space, some cat caretakers offer plastic storage boxes as litter boxes. Some manufacturers make large boxes with three tall sides and one which is lower.

Be careful to notice sudden sounds or activities that might deter a cat from keeping good habits in the litter box. For instance, placing a litter box near a furnace that makes noise when starting up, or appliances like washers and dryers which might have bells or buzzers that sound at random, could result in a problem. Even an occasional dryer load of tennis shoes pounding as they turn could interrupt your cat's feelings of safety near a litter box.

Always provide a clear delineation between eating areas and toileting areas. If your cat is restricted to a small space, keep bowls and boxes as well-separated as you can.

*Jacqueline C. Neilson, DVM, DACVB, a veterinary behaviorist, performed the majority of research referenced here. Dr. Neilson cautions that some cats' preferences may differ from the average results of her research. If you have a cat that doesn't seem to agree with the standard preferences, you may need to "audition" other options to learn what works best for your cat. Please see **Auditioning Litter Box Options** for more information.

Once your new cat or kitten has demonstrated good litter box habits, any elimination done outside of the box deserves immediate attention. The first step is to contact your veterinary office to investigate possible health issues. Please see **Solving Litter Box Problems** for more information.