

## A Purrfect Start

All cats have some basic needs; providing them will help ensure your cat's long-term health and welfare. If these needs are not met, your cat may feel stressed, which can affect both health and behavior. Listed here are things an "ideal" house for cats might include. Your cat(s) might not need all these features to get along, but making your house more "cat friendly" will ensure that you and your cat enjoy each other's company for years to come.

- The MOST IMPORTANT fact for cat owners to understand is that cats DO NOT respond to force, and that they DO respond to praise! Reprimands only work if you catch your cat "in the act". Punishment that follows an action by more than a few seconds won't stop him from doing it again, and may even cause him to be afraid of you or the surroundings. If you do catch you cat making a mistake, it is better for both of you to create a distraction by making a loud noise or throwing something (NOT at the cat!) that will attract its attention, but not toward you.
- Provide a room or other space she can call her own, complete with food and water, a bed (a cat carrier with a soft pad inside is a good choice), a litter box, a scratching/climbing post, a window to look out of, and some toys.
- Place food and the litter boxes away from appliances and air ducts that could come on unexpectedly, and locate them such that another animal (or human!) cannot sneak up on the cat while she uses them. To keep them appealing to the cat, food and water should be fresh, and the litter box "scooped" every day.

Give her something to scratch on to ensure that she can "do her thing" without damaging your things. Praise her profusely when you see her use it to let her know that this is hers to use.

- Provide places to climb and look out of windows to help keep your indoor cat(s) healthy and happy.

- Cats seem to prefer to feel like they are "in control" of their surroundings, and to choose the changes they want to make. When you make changes (food, litter, toys, etc.), offer them in a separate container next to the familiar one so your cat can decide whether or not to change.
- Be sure to see your veterinarian regularly. In addition to providing preventative health care through regular check-ups, they also can help you troubleshoot any "issues" before they become problems.

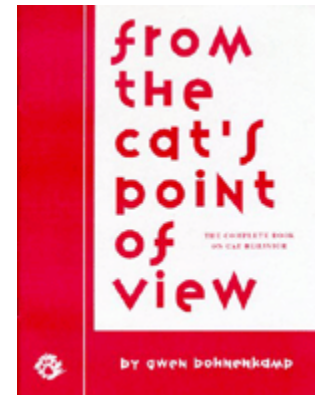
We can help ensure good health and welfare for our feline friends by keeping just a few facts in mind:

1. People (and most other mammals) are a pack species; cats are an independent species. This difference means that:
  - a. We tend to like to go to others to get them to play with us; cats prefer to come to us on their terms,
  - b. We tend to like longer visits less often; cats prefer shorter, more frequent visits. (that they initiate)
  - c. We tend to see shouting and punishment as forms of "conflict resolution"; cats see these as life-threatening.
2. The best indicator of your cat's health and welfare is regularly seeing these healthy behaviors:
  - a. Activity – confidently explores and uses the living space, including climbing and perching.
  - b. Interaction – initiates brief, frequent interactions with others in the house.
  - c. Food and Water Consumption – indoor-housed cats usually eat small meals and drink over the course of the day
  - d. Elimination Behavior – most cats use the litter box 2-4 times a day
  - e. Weight Loss or Gain – 10% either way can be important. You can monitor this using regular weighing or [body condition scoring](#)
  - f. Grooming – normally cats gently groom the entire body 2-3 times a day.
  - g. Sleeping Habits – sleeps in view, in favored places
  - h. Vocalizing – cats have different voices; you can learn what is normal for your cat so you can notice any changes.

3. Cats don't like unexpected change (who does?). Offering new things (foods, litter, toys, etc.) next to their familiar things in a separate container will let them tell you whether they like the old or new thing better.

A great start for new owners is *From the Cat's Point of View*, by Gwen Bohnenkamp.

From the Cat's Point of View answers nearly every question the new cat owner could have and gives the experienced cat owner a look at life from the other side of the scratching post. She also has a helpful [website](#).



## Litter Boxes

Cats eliminate to fulfill a fundamental need. They also use eliminations as a way to mark their territory. Indoor cats consider your home their territory.

You can help ensure that your cat doesn't feel the need to use eliminations to announce that your home is her territory by providing an attractive litter box. The goal is to provide your cat with a positive experience when using the litter box. Positive experiences encourage the cat to continue using the litter boxes we supply.

Cats tend to avoid things that they associate with a negative experience. If your cat has a negative experience while using the litter box, for example the litter is dirty or something startles her, the cat most likely will avoid that box in the future.

There are four basic things to consider when setting up a litter box:

- [1. Litter Box Hygiene](#)

- [2. Litter Box Type and Size](#)

### 3. Litter Substrate

### 4. Litter Box location and number

## Litter Box Hygiene

Cats are fastidiously clean. Most cats will avoid using a dirty litter box in favor of a cleaner place. That "cleaner place" may turn out to be your carpet, bed, or sofa. To prevent house-soiling the litter box must be scooped daily and washed weekly with mild dish detergent.

## Litter Box Type and Size

Litter boxes are available in a variety of sizes and shapes. Cats generally prefer large, uncovered litter boxes. Uncovered boxes are more easily accessible to your cat. Larger boxes are better because they can provide more room for your cat to move around. **As a rule the litter box should be large enough for your cat to stand up (on all fours) and turn around in.**

Boxes with high sides or rims around the top may be appropriate for cats that tend to scatter litter over the side while digging. Low sided boxes are appropriate for small kittens and older cats that have trouble getting in and out of the litter box.



Covered litter boxes are also available. Owners may use covered boxes to keep their dog out of the cat litter or to keep litter "out of sight". Some cats may prefer covered litter boxes because of the added privacy they provide. Remember that covered litter boxes will concentrate odors more than uncovered boxes. Your cat may refuse to use a covered box if it is not kept very clean.

## Litter Substrate

There are many different substrates or litters on the market. Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grained, unscented litters. Scoopable litters usually have finer grains than typical clay litter and have the added advantage of being easy to keep clean on a daily basis. Many cats are put off by the odor of scented or deodorant litters. This is also a good reason not to place room deodorizers or air fresheners

near the litter box. Odor should not be a problem if the litter box is kept clean. If you find the odor offensive, the cat will also find it offensive and may not want to eliminate there. **Remember, litter boxes should be scooped at least once a day and washed once a week with mild dish detergent.**

Once you find a litter that your cat likes, don't change types or brands or the cat may refuse to use the litter box. If you need to make a change the cat should be offered the new litter in a litter box placed next to the old box and litter. This allows the cat to decide if she wants to use the new litter. Fill boxes with enough litter to permit the cat to scratch and bury waste (usually about 2 inches deep).

## Litter Box Location and Number

Cats need quiet and privacy when using their litter box. Litter boxes should be placed away from appliances or air ducts that could suddenly come on and startle the cat. They also should be placed so that humans and other animals can't "sneak up" on the cat.

The litter box must be easily accessible. Don't place the litter box in "tight-spots" such as under vanity sinks or low tables. Remember, the cat needs to be able to stand and move around comfortably in the litter box. Consider the path the cat will take to reach the litter box. Don't place it so that she has to climb over furniture or other animals to use it. For example, a litter box that is placed near the dog's bed or behind the couch may not get much use.

**The Golden Rule is "one litter box per cat, plus one".** Problems such as urine spraying can be prevented or reduced by providing multiple litter boxes. Each cat requires a place to eliminate and mark territory. In homes with more than one story, litter boxes must be available on each level of the home. Cats don't like to walk far to get to the nearest litter box. If there are litter boxes on each level of the home, there is less likely to be a problem with laziness.

If you have addressed all four of the above issues and your cat is still not using the litter box, she could have a disease problem or feel threatened by something in her environment. You can read more about the causes of litter box problems in our [Problem Solving](#) section.

# Scratching

Scratching is a natural behavior for cats. Cats scratch to stretch their muscles, shed old cuticle, sharpen their claws, and leave scent marks. Even declawed cats retain the instinct to scratch. Scratching posts let cats scratch while saving your furniture and carpets! Consider the following factors to choose the right scratching post for your cat:

## What does your cat like to scratch?

Cats that scratch chair legs or the corners of your couch may prefer a vertical scratching post. Make sure that vertical scratching posts are tall enough so that your cat can stretch up to scratch. Cats that scratch rugs and carpets may prefer a horizontal scratching post or mat.

Choose a scratching post material that is similar to what your cat most likes to scratch. Most, but not all, cats prefer scratching posts made out of rough material they can shred. Sisal scratching posts are ideal because they are

satisfying to scratch and tough enough to stand up to repeated use. Vertical or upright and horizontal or flat scratching posts are available in a variety of sizes and materials including sisal (a coarse natural fiber), carpet and cardboard. Be sure to get one that is high enough to let your cat get a good stretch, and sturdy enough not to fall over during use!



## Where does your cat scratch?

Cats scratch to leave scent marks that define their territory and tell other cats they have passed through. They often scratch prominent objects near sleeping areas (so they can stretch after a nap) and room entrances, so think about adding scratching posts in these and other "public" parts of the house. Multi-cat households may need several scratching posts, both vertical and horizontal, located throughout the house. Put these posts in areas where the cats congregate, and along their routes to common areas

such as food and water bowls, and litter boxes. Having multiple scratching posts provides your cats with acceptable places to leave their mark without ruining furniture and carpets.

## **What if my cat won't use the scratching post?**

Think about your cat's scratching preferences and substitute similar objects for her to scratch. Once you have found an alternative scratching post, place it near the object you want the cat to stop scratching and cover *that* object with something your cat doesn't like, such as double-sided sticky tape, aluminum foil, sheets of sandpaper, or a plastic carpet runner with the pointy side up.

You also may give objects you don't want scratched an objectionable odor by spraying a citrus scent, perfume, or other odor your cat doesn't like on it. Don't use anything that could harm the cat, and be careful with strong odors because you don't want the nearby acceptable objects to also smell unpleasant. When your cat is consistently using the scratching post, you can very gradually (no more than three inches each day) move it to a location more suitable to you. It's best, however, to keep the scratching post as close to your cat's preferred scratching locations as possible.

## **Trimming your cat's nails**

Nail trims are an easy, and often overlooked, way to reduce damage from scratching. You can clip off the sharp tips of your cat's claws about once a week. There are several types of nail trimmers designed especially for cats. These are better than your own nail clipper because they won't crush the nail bed.

Before trimming your cat's claws, accustom her to having her paws handled and squeezed. You can do this by gently petting her legs and paws while giving her a treat. This will help to make it a more pleasant experience.

Gradually increase the pressure so that petting becomes gentle squeezing, as you'll need to do this to extend the claw. Continue with the treats until your cat tolerates having her feet handled. When she is ready, apply a small amount of pressure to the cat's paw, with your thumb on top of her paw and your index finger underneath, until a claw is extended. Near the cat's nail bed you should be able to see a pink area, called the "quick", which is a small blood vessel.

Don't cut into the pink portion of the nail because it will bleed and be painful for the cat. Cut off just the sharp tip of the claw to dull the claw. Go slowly with your cat or she may become fearful of having her nails trimmed. To begin with, trim just one foot each day. As your cat becomes accustomed to having her nails clipped you can trim all four feet at the same time. There is a [video here](#) to show you how it is done. If you prefer not to trim your cat's nails, you can purchase soft plastic caps that fit over the nail. Nail caps are available under the brand name Soft Paws and are available in a variety of sizes and colors. For more information on nail caps please visit [www.catscratching.com](http://www.catscratching.com)

## Resting areas

Cats are at their most vulnerable while sleeping, so they prefer to rest in an areas where they feel safe and secure. Desirable resting areas typically are quiet, comfortable locations where the cat can escape from other members of the family. Your cat may choose to get out of the way by resting on top of the kitchen cupboards or under the bed, or she may like to sleep curled up in her cat tree or on your bed or sofa.

Owners who prefer the cat to stay off of the bed and other furniture can encourage the cat to rest elsewhere by providing a refuge in a quiet part of the house. A refuge is a less-traveled or out-of-the-way area of the home where the cat has access to all of the necessities; a bed, food, water, a litter box, a scratching post, perch, and toys.

Cat beds can be purchased, but snug blankets and towels are just as appealing to cats and are easy to wash. The refuge should be a place where your cat feels safe and comfortable, for example a bedroom or back room. Your cat can retreat to her refuge when she wants to rest.

Wherever your cat chooses to rest it is important not to disturb her. Just as you may not want to be bothered while you are asleep or resting, neither does your cat. Respect your cat's privacy when she is resting and she will be more likely to seek you out when she is ready to interact.



# Perches

Cats need to know what is going on around them. They are cats, they are curious! They can hear sounds coming from outside and smell lots of strange things but they need to see what is happening out there. They want to know that it is safe, if they can hear and smell but can't see it, it might frighten them.

Cats need something that allows them to elevate themselves from ground level. Cats like to climb, a perch will provide them with a safe and private place to watch the action from above. A perch is anything that allows them to lie, sit, sleep or look outside from above, a perch is a must have for cats. Perches come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes, you can get perches that attach to the windowsill, or you could custom build a perch for them. More than one perch allows them to look outside at different angles.

You can place a couch, sofa, chair, or sturdy table in front of a window, so your cat can look outside. To make the scenery more attractive for them, you could hang a bird feeder in the yard, plant pretty flowers to attract bees, butterflies, and other insects. This will keep your cat interested, he may sit on his perch for hours and look outside.

Cats may feel safer if they can sleep somewhere high, provide them with places to climb up on, that make them feel safe and where no other animal or human could sneak up on them. If you are having a problem with finding a suitable area for a perch, watch your cat, he will show you where he feels comfortable, usually by curling up and falling asleep.

If you prefer that your cat uses a different area than he chose, you will need to offer him treats and kind words as you place him in the area you would like for him to use. Make this area more enticing, if he refuse to stay there, then allow him to approach it on his own. Put his favorite treat or toy on the perch so he will investigate. He may just use the couch, the end table, or top of the dresser to make his own perch.

Please consider this, when rearranging the furniture, or moving. Can he still see outside?

# Toys

Cat ancestors had to hunt insects, birds, mice and other small animals to survive. Since they had to catch 10 or 20 of these morsels every day, they had to be ready to pounce at a moment's notice. Indoor cats don't have to hunt anymore, but they still like to pounce.

Having things to stalk and pounce on also makes them happy, and helps keep them healthy and active. There are many different kinds of toys; you could buy your cat some of these, or make some yourself. Because of cat's heritage, they like toys that **do** something. Toys that squeak, chirp, jitter, swing or vibrate remind them of moving meals, enticing him to interact with it.

The first toy you might try is a furry mouse that makes noise and moves. Some even have catnip in them! You can just roll it past him on the floor to catch his attention; Your cat will let you know if it looks like lunch. Some cats like some toys better than others, just offer him a few and he will show you what he likes!

Cats also like toys such as a wand or stick with a toy dangling from the end of a string. They make them feel like they are using their natural quickness and agility to catch something, and they let them interact with you. Just let the toy dangle in front him, then slowly drag it away. Sometimes your cat can get carried away attacking it, so please be sure he can't bite or chew off a piece he could choke on.

Balls are another great item to use, because they let them "chase and capture". Cats are very good at swatting balls. Things that move on their own also fascinate them, so balls (like ping pong balls) and furry little mice toys that move are great

Cats also like toys they can catch, pick up, and toss in the air so they can catch them again. These are excellent to pass the time while you are away. You can fill balls with food or treats to encourage him to play — Cats feel like they are having a hunting and stalking session, and catching their own meal.

There isn't a set number of toys they need, but I need variety to keep from getting bored with the toys. Cats are like one of the kids; they like to have a batch of toys that can be rotated a few at a time to keep them interested. You can rotate them in different sequences to make the old toys seem new and exciting. Without this, cats just get bored, sleep twenty-three hours a day, and maybe get fat. Sometimes cats might love a toy so much that they may start sleeping next to it. When your cat do this he is telling you he

would like to keep it, and please don't include it in the rotation.

Cats also enjoy playing with simple things like crumpled up paper balls, the plastic rings off of milk jugs, the center rolls from toilet paper, cotton-tipped swabs, paper towels, lots of things. You can even stuff old cotton socks with cotton balls and a little catnip, then tie a knot in the end. Cats need an assortment of toys they can roll, pounce on, capture and sink their teeth into, carry and chase. As long as it is safe for them, please let them play with it.

Also because of their hunting heritage, cats like visual stimulation. If your cats don't have (or can't get to) a window to look out of, you could buy or make him a videotape from a nature show that has live action. Cats especially like to watch birds, fish, rodents and insects. These videos are great once in awhile when you can't be around to play with him.

## Identifying prey Preference

Most cats prefer to hunt specific creatures. For example, some cats prefer to chase mice, while others may prefer to catch birds or bugs. Identifying your cat's "prey preference" allows you to buy or make toys that your cat will be more likely to play with rather than ignore.

You can identify your cat's prey preference by paying close attention to the way he/she reacts to toys with specific qualities:

Find a number of toys or objects that resemble birds. Examples include feathers, stuffed toys covered in feathers, objects suspended in air, and toys making chirping noises. Entice your cat to play by making each object move and fly through the air. Does your cat follow the object? Does he/she follow all of the objects or ignore most of them? Take note.

Next, put those objects out of kitty's sight, and try objects resembling mice, such as fur, stuffed animals, furry mice, and balls. How does your cat react when you make each of these objects move? Does kitty want to chase it? Or is he/she waiting for you to bring the feathers back out?

Try both "bird toys" and "mouse toys" at the same time by alternating them about every 20 seconds.

Which does kitty prefer? Does he/she prefer some of each kind? Maybe she prefers both birds and mice!

Finally, put all of these toys away, and try toys resembling bugs. You can try a laser toy, a string with a knot on the end, and some dry food or treats tossed across the floor. How does your cat react? Try to alternate with "bird toys" and "mouse toys" to see which prey is best.

If your cat seems to enjoy feathers and/or objects in the air, choose toys resembling birds. If your cat prefers furry toys and/or toys moving on the ground, choose objects resembling mice. If your cat likes tiny objects with lots of movement, choose toys resembling bugs.

Be creative! Once you know what types of creatures your cat would like to hunt, think of the qualities those creatures possess and find toys with the same qualities. Think like a cat! When you look for potential toys for your cat, imagine what kind of animal it might resemble. After all, a ball of paper is not just a ball of paper... it's lunch!

This exercise should take only a few minutes for most cats, but as you learn to think like a cat, you may change what you think about your cat's prey preference.

If you are successful, you will be able to find the toys that make kitty want to play! If your cat loses interest, try a new toy with the same prey characteristics.

If your cat is still not interested, try offering a different kind of prey. Your cat may enjoy a variety!

## Making changes

Once you have checked all your cat's available resources, you may want to make some changes. We recommend that you choose the one change you are most interested in, think will be easiest to do, or is most pertinent to any problem you may be trying to resolve and start with it. Cats are creatures of habit, and you won't want to risk frightening your cat by changing too much too quickly. Once you've decided which change you want to make first, try to begin during a time when you have as few "outside distractions" as possible so you can monitor the change process. If you want to change food or litter, plan where you will store the new product, how you will discard used cans if you're going to feed a canned food, etc. before you start. A few minutes of careful planning may save hours of frustration trying to "get into" the new routine later.

A simple way to change the diet or litter is to offer the new food or litter in the cat's usual container next to the usual offering, using another container for the old product. If you can put both products in similar containers, it may make the change somewhat easier. If the cat doesn't eat a new canned food within an hour, take it up until the next feeding. Once the cat has been exposed to the food for a day or two, you may offer the new food first when the cat is the hungriest, then offer the cat its old diet after the cat has eaten some of the new food or if the cat refuses the new food, initially. Repeat this process until the cat is eating the new diet. Once the cat is eagerly eating the new diet, you can start decreasing the old diet until you are no longer feeding the old. You may decrease the old food in increments of  $\frac{1}{4}$  cups until the change is complete.

If the cat begins eating the new diet immediately, then you may start decreasing the old diet to complete the change process. With a new litter, once the cat uses the box, which may take a few days, you can start decreasing the old litter to complete the change process, and remove the box.

For new structures, cats should be allowed to explore them at their convenience; [Feliway](#), catnip, or a favorite toy or treat may be used to tempt the cat to try it. When introducing toys or play, cats often are most attentive before they are fed, and when they are rewarded by small amounts of treats (that replace some of the usual diet to avoid obesity).

## Refuge

A refuge is a less-traveled or out-of-the-way area of the home where the cat has access to all the necessities; food, water, a litter box, a scratching post, perch, and toys. This should be a place where your cat feels safe and comfortable, for example a bedroom or back room.

The refuge is a place your cat can retreat to when she needs quiet time alone. Your cat should be able to come and go freely from her refuge. When the cat is in her refuge, other members of the household, including people and pets, should not be allowed to bother her.

Leaving a radio or TV on for your cat muffles sounds she hears but can't identify. The radio or TV will also provide human voices for your cat to associate with safety. Using [Feliway](#) spray or a Feliway Diffuser in your cat's refuge can make it seem safer and more inviting.

## What is Feliway?

Feliway spray is a feline facial pheromone analogue. That means that it is a man-made version of the substance your cat deposits when she rubs her cheek on your leg or furniture. This substance is a signal that cats use to mark objects in their "territory". The smell tells the cat she is in a safe place. Feliway can be used to make a new place or situation "feel" more familiar and safe for cats.



Feliway is now available as a diffuser that plugs into a wall outlet (just like an air freshener). This may be a good choice for cats that are more anxious or require continuous calming.

For more information visit [Feliway.com](http://Feliway.com).

## FACT (free access crate training)

*FACT* is an alternative way to provide a refuge for your cat. *FACT* is similar to crate-training for dogs. The cat accepts the crate or carrier as her own safe haven. For cats, the carrier should be big enough to hold bedding, food and water bowls, and a litter box big enough for the cat. Place the carrier in a quiet and secure place in the house, for example your bedroom. Cats prefer to be at a height where they can look down on their surroundings. Putting the carrier on a bench or dresser may make it more attractive to the cat. For cats who already associate the carrier with scary experiences (like trips to the vet) you can start out slowly. First, put the carrier in a place where the cat usually rests. Take off the top and the door. Put

the cat's favorite blanket in the bottom of the carrier. Create positive associations with the carrier by playing with, petting, and feeding the cat near the carrier. Once she accepts this, attach the top of the carrier and let her get used to it too. Once the cat accepts both the top and the bottom, then add the door. If the cat is reluctant to use the carrier, applying [Feliway](#) spray may make her more comfortable. *FACT* not only provides the cat with a refuge in your home, but allows the cat to take her personal space with her everywhere she goes. Veterinary visits, boarding, travel, and moving to a new home are easier because the cat feels secure in her space. Having her own space also makes the cat less likely to feel the need to compete with other animals for territory and may help decrease fighting and urine marking. For more detailed information on *FACT* please visit: <http://www.mmilani.com/writing/articles/cats/feline-crate-training>.