

# Setting Up Your Cat's Litterbox

Cats often have strong, specific preferences about where they eliminate, so you'll want to make sure the litter box setup meets with their approval. The following is a list of considerations that you must make when setting up your cat's litterbox.

## How Many Litterboxes Do I Need?

You'll need at least one litter box per cat in your household, plus one. Some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another, and some cats won't use a litter box that another cat has used. The more choices your cat has, the more likely they'll find at least one box to their liking at any given time. Also, in a multiple cat household, watch carefully to be sure that one cat isn't preventing another one from accessing the box. If this is the case you may need to keep them separated to ensure that each cat can freely access at least one litter box.

## Where Do I Keep the Litterbox?

Litter boxes need to be easily accessible -- for example, at least one per floor in a multistory house. You can't expect your cat to go from the second story to the basement to use the box. Also, if a cat has to jump too high or go over too many obstacles to get to the box, they may not bother. The box should be in a quiet, private place where your cat won't be startled or frightened. Avoid getting too close to noisy appliances like washing machines or furnaces. Most cats prefer a location where there is privacy, a feeling of safety, and an escape path (even if you are sure your cat will never be ambushed while using the box, your cat doesn't know that!). Set your litterbox up in an area where your cat can easily escape from multiple angles in case he perceives the need to make a quick exit. Your cat may also object if the litter box is too near their food or water bowls. Keep the box at least 12 feet from the bowls, preferably in another room entirely.

## Things to Remember

Make sure the litter box is large enough for your cat to climb in comfortably and to exercise instinctive behaviors like scratching the litter and burying their feces.

Cats typically don't like litterbox covers - While you may like the convenience and hygienic aspects of litter box covers and liners, the majority of cats don't like either. Covers can trap odors and take away visibility, leaving cats feeling vulnerable, and liners can get caught in cats' claws, an unpleasant sensation that they may want to avoid.

Cleanliness is essential. Clean litter boxes daily. Cats are more sensitive than we are to odors, and most cats won't use a box that smells bad to them.

If you use clumping litter, scooping daily and cleaning the box when it's soiled may be sufficient, but if you find the litter breaks up easily, you'll probably need to replace it occasionally. If you use clay litter, scoop feces every day and replace the litter at least twice a week, more often if necessary. Avoid strong fragrances in association with the litter box. This includes scented litters, litter box deodorizers, and cleaning products with strong odors. They may smell nice to you, but cats dislike those smells. If you are considering changing your cat's litter, purchase a new litterbox to put the new litter in.

To clean the litter box, use mild dishwashing soap and hot water and rinse well. A final scrub with baking soda can help eliminate lingering odors, including the odor of the soap. If the box still retains an odor after being washed, it may be time to replace it.

Find a type of litter your cat likes and stick with it. Most cats prefer a fine-grained litter, but cats are individuals. Try different kinds to see what works. Clumping litter makes a box easier to keep clean, so you may want to go with that if your cat is okay with it -- just stick with the unscented varieties. Note that kittens under four months old need a non-clumping litter. Kittens can ingest the litter, and clumping litter can cause serious digestive problems.

The depth of the litter matters, too. Most cats dislike deep litter, so start with a depth of an inch and adjust from there to find your cat's preference.

## Common Issues

If your newly-acquired cat isn't using the litter box, go back through the above list to make sure your setup is ideal. If a cat that has been using the box starts going elsewhere, consider whether something has changed. Did you buy a different brand of litter? Did you fail to rinse the box thoroughly last time you cleaned it? Could your cat have been scared by something -- a falling object, a flushing toilet, a noisy dryer -- last time they used the box?

In case your cat has developed a negative association with the box's current location, try moving it to some other areas to see if the cat will start using it again. Better yet, add one or two new boxes in different areas and see which the cat prefers. Try different types of litter in one or more of the boxes, too. If you give your cat choices they'll be able to show you what they like best.