

Preventing and Solving Litter Box Problems

Inappropriate elimination in cats is a very common and frustrating problem, and can be caused by many different factors. Most cats require little training to use their litter box, because cats have a natural desire to dig and bury their waste. But once a cat has developed undesirable toilet habits the problem can be very difficult to resolve. Follow these suggestions to prevent and solve litter box problems.

How to prevent litter box problems

Pick the right litter box location

- Place the litter box in a semi-private area, away from lots of traffic.
- Keep kittens in a small room with a litter box for a few days until they use it consistently.
- Avoid placing the box next to your cat's food or water, or near loud noises (washing machines, etc.) that may be startling or scary.
- Avoid corners and tight areas like closets where your cat might feel trapped.

Select your litter carefully

Use plain, unscented clumping litter. Once you have found a litter that seems to please your cat, don't switch.

Keep the litter box clean

Solid waste and clumps should be scooped out daily. Empty the entire box and wash it with warm water at least once a month. We don't like to use dirty toilets — neither do cats!

Have one litter box per cat, plus one

A household with three cats should contain four litter boxes. Many cats will refuse to go in a box that already contains waste.

How to solve litter box problems (hopefully)

Rule out illness

Check with your veterinarian to make sure that medical issues aren't the underlying cause. Be sure to fully explain the litter box issue and request a urinalysis, stool check, and a blood draw (especially if your cat is a senior).

Don't punish your cat

Physical and verbal punishment will likely make the problem worse. Contrary to popular belief, litter box problems have nothing to do with spite and are often caused by stress.

Do a test

Place numerous litter boxes around the house with different linings: newspaper, clumping litter, non-clumping litter, sand, sawdust, carpet remnants, and no litter at all. If you find that your cat prefers an unacceptable surface (such as carpet), try to slowly convert the cat back to a litter by adding a little litter each week. Continue adding more litter until you can remove the carpet remnants from the box.

Clean properly

- Clean soiled areas with an enzyme-based cleaner like Nature's Miracle. Regular cleaners will not break down the urine/stool traces, so your cat may continue to use those spots. If the carpet or padding is saturated, it may need to be replaced.
- Increase litter box cleaning. Scoop the litter boxes at least twice daily and wash them once a week with soap and warm water only (do not use a strong-smelling disinfectant).

- Try different depths of litter. If you routinely find excess clean litter on the floor beside the box, you're probably using too much. Aim for around two inches.
-

Confine

- If the problem is only in one area, close the door to keep your cat out.
- If needed, confine your cat to a small, cat-proofed room with bedding, food, water, toys, and at least one litter box. Keep him there until you can be sure he is using his litter box, then gradually allow him access to other areas of the house.

Other Techniques

- Feed your cat where he is urinating/defecating, because many cats will not do both in the same place.
- Use aluminum foil, upside-down carpet runners (with the plastic spikes on the bottom), or double-sided tape, to encourage your cat to avoid areas where he has eliminated before.
- Try Feliway or a Sentry-calming collar.