

## **Cat Litter box Solutions**

The tips below were compiled from messages on several email lists – and they are very helpful if you are dealing with litter box problems. This is information that may save the life of any cat you know! Please save this information should you need it or to pass along to anyone who's at their "wits end" with litter box problems. Soiling "outside the box" is the number one reason cats are abandoned or put down, so this information could save a cat's life!

**REMEMBER:** Cat's aren't trying to get back at you by soiling, they are doing it for perfectly logical reasons – you need to think like a cat in order to change your cat's behavior. Never, ever punish your cat as you will not change the behavior, but only make your cat afraid of you.

- First and foremost, a vet needs to check the cat out to make sure there is no infection or anything medically going on. If this is a urination problem, there could be an infection, UTI (urinary tract infection). If this is a defecation problem, the cat could have worms, giardia, or an allergy to a new food. Cats are "associative beings", which means that if they associate the cat box or type of litter with painful urination or defecation, even after curing the infection they will still associate pain with the litter box. Therefore, in order to break the associative disorder, it's advised to buy a NEW box and perhaps a new litter type and go from there. If this has already been done, then just follow the next steps.
- Have there been any changes in the cat's lifestyle: net pet, new baby, new house, new/change of litter brand or type, different type of litter box, person leaving home, or any other change? Cats do not like change. They may only need a little bit of time to adjust.
- Do not allow an offending cat to have the run of your house. The cat needs to be confined to one small room like a bathroom or laundry room. This room should not have carpet.
- The cat should have two litter boxes, one covered and one uncovered put in its room. Make one of the litter boxes a larger box than the cat usually uses - sometimes they need additional space. Some cats do not like covered boxes because they can be cornered with no escape route. Some cats like to use one box for urination and one for defecation. You will quickly find the answers to these questions when you clean the boxes. You will know which type of box the cat prefers.
- The room should have a bed, food and water, as well as favorite toys. The food should not be close to the litter box. Use only bottled or filtered water. Sometimes a change in water will cause a problem.

- The boxes need to be scooped or dumped twice a day, morning and night, so that the cat does not have an issue with whether the boxes are clean. If you find that scooping does not work, use only a small amount of litter and dump it daily. You can use the cheapest clay litter if this happens.
- After a week if the cat is using the litter box, let the cat out while you are home. Let the cat out for only a few short hours a day as long as the cat continues to use the litter box. The cat should spend the night or any time alone in its room.
- After a week of this, let the cat out permanently as long as the cat uses the litter box.
- If the cat should have an accident, it needs to be cleaned up immediately and thoroughly. If the accident is on carpet, an enzyme cleaner needs to be used so that the smell is totally destroyed. Carpet pad may need to be pulled out. You've got to use an enzymatic cleaner to get rid of those stains and odors, because your cat's nose will bring them back to previous elimination spots and s/he will pee/poop there again. Simple Solution by Brampton, Nature's Miracle, Anti-Icky-Poo (<http://www.antiickypoo.com>), and Simple Solution Stain & Odor Remover are good cleaners and deodorizers. Saturate the spot with solution and keep it wet for 24 hours, covering it with plastic & spraying it several times. Remember that the urine soaked in deeply and then spread horizontally throughout the fibers, so you must get the product deeply into whatever is stained or smells. Do not use anything that is ammonia-based, because of its "urine-like" scent to a cat. (Natural option – mix very well together 1 Tbsp. baking soda, 1 c. hydrogen peroxide and about 4-5 drops of dish detergent. Pour over the spot and scrub in. Let sit for a couple of hours and then shampoo out. This gets rid of dog stains and even gets skunk smell out – it is amazing!)
- There is also a product called Feliway that is guaranteed to work. It is used on the area where the accident occurred. Feliway also has a plug-in for electric outlets. <http://www.feliway.com> This smells like friendly pheromones to a cat when sprayed in a cat's environment. It creates a comforting, reassuring feeling that reduces the impulse to urine mark or scratch.
- Thoroughly clean the litter boxes at least once a week. Do not use bleach unless you rinse all the bleach out and let the box dry in the sun. Bleach and urine make gas and also create ammonia. Bleach will cause a cat to stop using the litter box.

More tips:

- **USE SANDY TEXTURES:** Cats originated as desert animals and as such, they truly prefer soft, sandy textures. Avoid the new crystal products & coarse litters, as they are painful to the tender pads of many cats, and "just don't feel right." Use clumping litters whenever possible, except for kittens under four

weeks old (who can inhale / ingest the clumping substance and develop health problems, sometimes fatal).

- CAT ATTRACT: Use Cat Attract as an additive to the litter box – it “attracts” cats to the box. Read more about this product here: <http://www.preciouscat.com/>

- WORLD’S BEST: A clay-free litter product, made with corn.

- COVERED BOXES: Many cats do not like using covered litter boxes to eliminate because that puts them in a very vulnerable position. Some larger cats may also not be able to position themselves inside the covered box to eliminate comfortably.

- SCENTED LITTER: Scented litter is another “turn off” to cats and will often make them go elsewhere. Cats’ noses are 1,000% more sensitive than ours, and can find the smells of roses and cheap perfumes in the litter repulsive, so always choose unscented litter. Try mixing about ½ cup baking soda into the box if odor is a problem to your nostrils.

- BOX SIZE: Try a different sized box, especially for those overweight cats, or cats whose urine sprays outside the box. Go to Home Depot, Wal-mart, etc and buy a BIG Rubbermaid or plastic storage box. If s/he’s a sprayer, get one that’s very high and cut out an oval entrance in front. If s/he has arthritis, put a little ramp up to the entrance. If they kick litter all over the place, buy one of those large plastic washing machine liners and put your box(es) into it. It’s much cheaper to buy these items at a department store than from a pet store.

- BEST, CHEAPEST SCOOPER: Best scoopers are flat metal utensils with little holes or slits – I’ve found the best ones at the dollar store!

- LOCATION OF BOX: Please put a box on EACH LEVEL of your house in a quiet, out of the way location, that’s not next to a heater, washing machine or appliance that could suddenly start up and frighten your cat. Be mindful of older cats that may suffer from arthritis and bladder problems and might find a long trip to the basement painful and difficult (put a ramp or phone book in front of the box entrance to help them step up). Though cats see better than us in low light, cats can’t see in the dark, so please don’t put their box in a pitch dark basement, especially for a new cat who doesn’t know where the box is! A general rule of thumb is to have one box for each cat and put each box in a different location so they aren’t competing for the box. And don’t place them next to their food or water. Would you want to eat next to your toilet?

- CLEANING: Look at the box itself next time you scoop out the poop and remember that the cat’s nose is 1,000% more sensitive than yours. After scrubbing it with soap and water, and perhaps a bit of bleach, rinse it out thoroughly. You may want to place it in the sun to dry as sunshine is a natural

disinfectant. Then put your nose into the box and take a deep sniff. If there's a lingering odor or it's covered in scratches and discoloration, throw it out and buy a nice new one.

- **DECLAWED CATS:** As sad as it is, it might be too painful for a de-clawed cat to use the litter box. We must all remember that de-claws have been maimed for life - while some adjust and get over it, some are so badly traumatized and injured that they never do. Put a piece of carpet into the litter box instead of litter. Add a small amount of cat attract or catnip to it. This will attract the cat, and the carpeting will not hurt their bones or pads. Put the box in the bathroom or a room with no carpeting and keep the cat in there until they start using the litter box. Make sure the box does not have a high lip because raising paws and exerting pressure on front of the cat's paws may hurt. I use the bottom of a large crate/kennel for this. Have extra pieces of carpeting so the carpeting can be removed daily and washed off, replacing with another piece while it dries. Eventually you may transition to shredded newspaper because most litter will hurt their paws.

- **PRAISE:** Praise the cat with hugs and kisses or treats when you see them going into the litter box. They do respond well to this.

- **PLAY WITH YOUR CAT – STRESS CAN CAUSE ELIMINATION PROBLEMS:** Many elimination problems stem from boredom. Cats are designed to be hunters and become incredibly bored and frustrated when they are denied the opportunity. Spend at least 15 minutes each day playing with your cat. Toys like "da bird" are excellent; anything interactive that makes your cat run and chase. Laser toys are OK, but never shine them in your cat's eyes. Remember lasers may eventually frustrate the cat as they are never actually able to catch anything. Be sure your cat has plenty of toys to stalk and chase. Here's a great site for toys: <http://www.cattoys.com> You might also want to consider acquiring another cat or two so your pet has somebody to play with. Use caution – do not leave string toys lying around as your cat can choke to death on string, or it can end up wrapped around his internal organs and intestines.

- **TIP FOR ACQUIRING A NEW CAT:** While keeping the cats separated in different rooms, try wiping each cat's fur with a separate towel daily. Then place each cat's food dish on top of the other cat's towel. They will associate each other's scent with the positive experience of being fed, and grow tolerant of each other more quickly.