

Taking the
Hassle
out of
Housetraining
Your Kitty



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While most cats can be trained to use a litter box, it's important that you help your kitten get off to a good start. If possible, you should obtain a kitten that already has been litter box trained in his previous home. He will adapt to a new environment more quickly than a kitten that has not been trained.

The right equipment

When you get a new kitten, find out what type of litter he used in his previous home. Use the same type of litter at first, then gradually introduce him to a new brand if necessary. Often a plastic box is the most practical and easy to clean. The sides should be low enough that your kitten can easily climb in and out. Place the box in a relatively quiet area of your home with minimal traffic, where your kitten can have some privacy. Be sure the box is easily accessible, perhaps near to your kitten's sleeping area. Some kittens dislike scented litter, so it is usually best to start with an unscented clay or clumping litter. If you already have cats at home, provide an additional box for each new cat. Most kittens will automatically use kitty litter in preference to other surfaces, except perhaps the soil of a potted plant. To prevent mishaps, keep plants out of your kitten's reach or cover the soil with pine cones or decorative rock.

To ensure that your kitten uses his litter box every time, keep him within eyesight at all times. If he stops playing and begins sniffing around, gently carry him to the litter box. Praise any sniffing or scratching and give him loads of praise or a small food treat for eliminating. Whenever you are unable to watch your kitten, restrict him to a cat-proofed room with his litter box. Continue this for at least the first two weeks, until your kitten is using his box regularly.

Using a covered litter box can help control the odor in your home and can be helpful for kittens with poor aim. If your cat is reluctant to use a covered box, condition him to this setup by placing a large cardboard box over his litter box. Gradually decrease the size of the cardboard until it approximates the commercial box. Then make the switch.

It's a dirty job, but you've got to do it

You must keep the box clean so that your kitten will return to use it. To start out, it is better to err on the side of being too fastidious about the cleaning. Scoop the box at least once daily and more often if you have the time. Completely clean the entire box once a week, unless you are using a clumping litter (which might only need a complete cleaning every two to four weeks). To clean the box, empty out the contents, use soap and hot water, and rinse well to remove all the soap odor.

Once you have found a brand of litter, type of box, and location your kitten likes, avoid making sudden changes. If you want to change the litter, place the box with the new litter in a new location, but do not take away the old litter until your kitten is using the new brand. Or try mixing the new and old brands for a few weeks.

Since it is important that your kitten feels comfortable where he eliminates, try to prevent anything unpleasant from happening when he is near his litter box. Don't give your cat medicine or scold him when he's near the box. Locate the box in an area free of startling noises, such as a washing machine, radiator, or furnace. If you need to keep your kitten away from children or dogs, use a baby gate or a kitty door to a quiet room.

When mistakes occur

If your kitten eliminates outside his box, it won't take long for him to develop a habit of using this undesirable area. So it is essential that you identify and correct the cause right away.

Causes for housoiling

- Brand of litter was changed
- Litter has scented additives or the odor of cleansers/deodorants
- Litter box is not cleaned frequently enough
- Litter box was moved to a noisy area
- Kitten was frightened in or near the box
- Kitten has medical problems

If the habit persists make certain that the soiled area has been thoroughly cleaned and treated with a commercial odor neutralizer. Many cats will not soil an area where their food or water is placed. To decrease the appeal of the soiled area, place a sheet of plastic carpet runner (nubs up), two-sided sticky tape, an aversive odor (perfume, deodorized soap), or a motion detector alarm in the area. Never punish your kitten for making a mess outside his litter box. Punishment usually makes things worse or creates other problems such as fear of the owner, especially if you swat your kitten or rub his nose in the mess.

If your kitten continues to eliminate out of the litter box, take him to your veterinarian. A physical exam and lab tests can make sure there are no existing medical problems. For example, bladder disease, diarrhea, and constipation can irritate your kitten when he eliminates and cause him to avoid the box.