



Housetraining Kittens

While most cats can be trained to use a litter box, it is 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 its previous home. It 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 it used in its previous home. Use the same type of litter at first, then gradually introduce it 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 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 pinecones or decorative rock.



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

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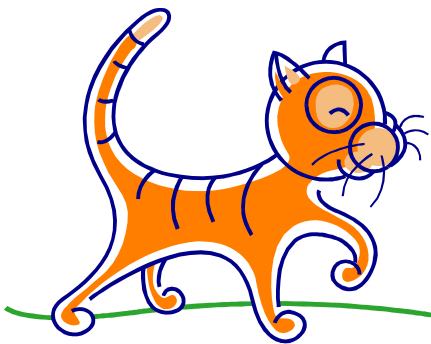
Since it is important that your kitten feels comfortable where it eliminates, try to prevent anything unpleasant from happening when it is near its litter box. Do not give your cat medicine or scold it when it's near the box. Locate the box in an area free of startling noises, such as a washing machine, 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 its box, it will not take long for it to develop a habit of using this undesirable area; therefore it is essential that you identify and correct the cause right away.

Causes for House Soiling

- 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, and aversive odor (perfume, deodorized soap), or a motion detector alarm in the area. Never punish your kitten for making a mess outside its 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 its nose in the mess.

If your kitten continues to eliminate out of the litter box, take it 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 it eliminates and cause it to avoid the box.

Spraying

As kittens mature, they may begin to spray. Spraying is a form of territorial marking - cats typically will urinate on vertical surfaces such as walls and furniture. Although neutering eliminates most spraying, some neutered cats do spray. If the problem persists after neutering, seek advice from your veterinarian.

Kittens are creatures of habit. Once you find a litter and box location that the cat likes, stick with it.

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