Litterbox Training



Cats require regular access to an appropriate place for eliminating. Most people supply their cat with a litterbox. The cat does not simply need a litterbox, it needs a clean box with fresh litter. Cats will be inhibited from the using the box if it smells of urine. Cats are very fastidious. The litterbox must be cleaned at least once each day.

Make sure the litterbox is in an appropriate place. Cats do not like to eliminate in the area close to their sleeping or eating areas, so try to locate the box some distance away. However, do not place the box in an area that is too inaccessible. For example, if the litterbox is placed in the bathroom, make sure the door cannot swing shut and prevent the cat from getting ot its box. If the cat is new to the house, it may go into hiding for a few days and may not be too keen on investigating the rest of the house, so place the box fairly close to its hiding place. If there is more than one cat in the house, have several litterboxes available.

PROBLEMS?

The most common reason a cat stops using its litterbox is because the box is dirty - from the cat's point of view - not yours. A variety of other factors might also cause the breakdown of housetraining. There may have been social changes - a new cat in the neighborhood or children home on vacation. It may be something as simple as you stepped in some cat feces and walked in the house. Your cat could also be spraying or marking its territory with urine. Cats often react to any type of stress by suddenly urinating or defecating outside the litterbox. Urinary tract problems also cause cats to urinate in places other than the litterbox. It is VERY important that any sudden change in elimination habits be discussed with your veterinarian.

Until your cat is fully housetrained, it should not be allowed to have the run of the house. Each time you allow the cat to make a mistake, the behavior is further established as a habit. Punishing your cat after the fact teaches it only to be afraid of you. Never physically reprimand your cat, even if you catch it in the act; it will react very badly. Scolding and then taking the cat to its box after it has already eliminated, teaches the cat to associate the litterbox with punishment. Basically, punishment doesn't work with cats - prevention and praise for getting it right are the keys to training. While "correcting" the problem, when you leave the house for any length of time, you should confine your cat to a single room. Your cat should be provided with a fresh bowl of water and a warm place to sleep at one end of the room and a freshly cleaned litterbox at the other end. This confinement is only a TEMPORARY measure until the problem is solved. There are natural enzyme products on the market that work great for clean up.

In order to reward your cat for eliminating in an appropriate place, you must be there at the time your cat eliminates. Most cats (especially kittens) will want to eliminate immediately after waking. In addition, they will usually defecate and sometimes urinate within half an hour or so after eating and exercise. Call your cat to its litterbox from a variety of places around the house. When the cat gets to the box, scratch the litter to get it interested. Do this throughout the day. Encourage your cat to hop into the box and praise it when it does. Even if it does not eliminate, it is learning that the box is a great CLEAN place to be. This is especially important for cats that are now avoiding the litterbox because they assume it is always dirty or because they associate it with being punished. Praise your cat, gently stroke it and take the time to tell it how pleased you are.

As a rule, cats are very good about using their litterbox. If they stop there is a reason. You need to find out what that reason is.