



# Adopting a New Cat

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## Bringing Home a New Cat

by Mary Anne Miller

### **Preparations**

Cats are territorial animals. They mark their territory, perform daily patrols and know every nook and cranny in and about their home. Cats are also creatures of habit and do not take very well to sudden change. They find being moved from one house and neighborhood to another very stressful.

Imagine what it must be like for the poor cat if she also has to get to know new owners as well as confronting changes in food, water, household routines, and rules. It is no wonder that some cats experience difficulties when they are introduced into a new home.

Different cats react in different ways to change, but they all benefit from a gradual introduction to a new household - especially when other cats are involved. Kittens are usually more adjustable and young kittens can sometimes make themselves at home within hours. Older cats that are often more set in their ways will take longer to adjust.

If you know you're about to bring a new cat into your home, be it from a breeder, from friends, or a stray from the street or a shelter, there are a few things you should take care of in advance to make the transition easier for both you and your new feline friend.

### **Getting the House Ready**

Cats are very curious by nature and will eventually investigate everything in their new territory. This characteristic can get them into trouble, and it is up to us to make the house as cat-safe as possible. This is especially important when the new arrival is a kitten. Here is a short list of things to look for and get out of kitty's way:

- **Plants** - some common household plants can be very toxic for cats. While most cats tend to leave them alone, a curious kitty or a cat with a craving for greenery might be tempted (cats do like to eat greens!). Common plants that are poisonous to cats are poinsettia, ivy, lupine, azalea, and rhododendron.
- **Cords and Strings** - These are irresistible toys for many cats and kittens, but they can be extremely dangerous. Chewed electric cords can cause a deadly electric shock, while swallowed strings or rubber bands may become entangled in the cat's intestines and cause severe internal damage. Most pet stores carry something called "apple bitter" which can be applied to electrical wires that your cat is tempted to chew.
- **Open doors and windows** - Should the cat get out, she might easily get lost in unfamiliar surroundings. Whether you plan to keep your cat as an indoor-only cat or allow her some access



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to the outdoors, make sure kitty cannot get out unsupervised for at least the first few weeks. Secure all doors and windows and be sure that no hatch can be opened by a curious cat.

- **Other hazards** - It goes without saying that the usual toxic items, such as cleaning materials (sprays, fluids, powders) and various insecticides should be in secure cupboards. Insecticide containers are required by law to carry warnings about how their use around animals. Always read labels! Remember also that what is safe for use around dogs may be harmful to your new cat.

Other than that, use your common sense and have a look around, trying to see your home the way a cat would. Remove breakable objects from shelves and block access to any places where kitty may manage to squeeze in and get stuck. Cats live in a 3D world!

### **Getting Family Members Ready**

If you share your home with other people, you should get them ready as well. First explain the special situation kitty will be in and the need for patience. Excited family members will have to give the cat some time to adjust to the new environment before they can handle her, and this could take a while, particularly with older cats.

Don't forget to tell everyone about new house rules, such as making sure doors and windows are shut during kitty's settling in period, not leaving food on tables and kitchen counters, and double checking before turning on the washer and drier. Many cats meet a very unpleasant death in the washer or dryer.

The rules the cat will have to live by, such as not getting table scraps or not jumping onto certain places, are best reinforced when everyone in the house sticks to them, so make sure these are clear and agreed upon. Cats can learn the meaning of the word "No," but hitting or slapping a cat will only result in an angry cat that doesn't trust you.

### **The Sanctuary Room**

Allowing the cat access to the whole house from Day One will almost invariably be too overwhelming and create stress. For the at least the first few days, the cat is best off confined to one area or space.

Set aside one room that will serve as the "sanctuary room" before you bring kitty home. The room should be a quiet one with little or no human traffic. Make sure that all windows are well shut, so that your cat won't climb her way out. It is also best if the cat will be able to have access to this room once you open the door to the rest of the home.

Place the cat's feeding and water bowls in one corner of the room and a litter box some distance away – preferably the other side of the room. This is important because cats do not like to use a litter box in



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close proximity to their sleeping or eating places, and they may choose to use another place in the room for elimination purposes to keep their feeding area uncontaminated.

Add some cat toys and make sure that kitty has several safe hiding places. (Any “wand” or “fishing-pole” type toys should only be used under supervision of a person and should otherwise be inaccessible to kitty.) Under a bed is a good spot, but a cat carrier with its door removed or a cardboard box turned on its side can give your new friend an added sense of safety, especially if you put a warm blanket inside. (Don’t forget that cats are fastidious creatures and like their bedding cleaned or changed frequently.)

### **Bringing Kitty Home**

Always bring a kitten or cat in a secure cat carrier. Never let the cat loose in the car or carry her in your arms into your home. Even the most docile cat can suddenly become frightened and claw her way out of your arms. The carrier makes kitty feel more secure - she can look at the outside world while being protected from it. It is also a good idea if you can to leave the crate with its door open somewhere the cat will always have access to it. This will make future trips to the Vet much easier!

As you enter your home, avoid having excited family members greet the newcomer with loud voices and attempts to touch or hold it. Introductions can be made later on when the cat is more relaxed. This is especially true if you have other pets. Ignore their curiosity and walk with the carrier straight into the sanctuary room.

Once at the room, put the carrier down in a corner, open the latch, and open the door. Then simply leave the room, close the door, and let the cat get out of the carrier in her own time and explore the room. The cat’s first priority is getting to know the new territory. Only after she’s comfortable in the room, will she be able to meet and positively interact with people and other animal inhabitants of “her” new place.

Check on her every few hours to see how she is doing. Some cats will walk out of the carrier and make themselves at home within minutes. Others will take a few hours or even days before they feel comfortable enough to welcome you when you come. As long as the cat is eating, drinking, and using the litter box, you’re doing fine. The most important thing for the new owner is patience. Each cat has its own personality, and to make your cat a happy one, time is your friend!

If the cat is particularly timid, you may need to make an extra effort to integrate her into the household. Spend several hours a day (or as long as you can) befriending the cat. Sit on the floor in the room and try feeding her her food from a spoon. You can also try coaxing her into some interactive playtime (especially effective with kittens). Talk to her gently and calmly, and, with time, she should start feeling more secure when you are around. Reading to her will also help! Play classical music softly in the room to help calm



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her. Spend time with her, but don't push yourself on her. Always let her come to you when she's ready, when she feels safe with you.

If the cat is outgoing, try engaging her in play with wand toys. Interactive play is a great way to start building a trusting relationship. If she appears to be confident and looking for human interaction, allow other family members to come in and share some quality time getting to know the new cat. Do not let other cats or dogs into the room at this stage, because this can be very stressful for all animals involved.

### **Settling In**

When you sense that the cat feels safe in her room (usually after a few days to a week), open the door and let her explore the rest of the house. This is best done at times when there are few people around and you have the time to patiently supervise kitty's first tour of the house. Don't forget to close the windows and doors! It will help if the TV is either not on or not loud. Always make sure that the house is as kitty-proof as possible, with all dangerous temptations out of the way.

Most importantly – just do your best to take it at your cat's pace. She may love you with all her heart, but may always want to flee to a safe space when she hears something that scares her.

### **Hissing**

NEVER TAKE HISSING PERSONALLY. This is the only method your cat has to communicate that she wants to be left alone, or that you have reached too close before she is ready for it. Sometimes it is simply because you surprised her. Maybe she's under the bed, and you reach under there to pull out a box with sweaters in it. If she was asleep and you "surprised" her and she woke up – she may hiss just because it was a surprise. You can tell by slowly reaching your hand out toward her again – palm down. Unlike dogs, palm down is less threatening to cats. If she was just scared, she'll sniff your fingers without hissing. If she wants her space, she'll let you know!

Cats are fun-loving and endearing. But like all animals, they need time to adjust to a new environment and new people. With time, love and patience, your kitten or cat will become a treasured friend.



# The Litter Box: How to Make Sure Your Cat Uses It

by Anne Moss

As cat owners, we need to make sure that the litter box meets our cat's demands and with some cats this is not an easy task. Cats can be very fussy about their litter box, and if anything fails to meet their standards, some cats may stop using their box. Sometimes, this can happen after years of using the same box and the reasons are not always clear to us. Also be aware – cats often have litter box problems when they are ill. A litter box problem might mean your cat needs to see the Vet, and you should pursue this option first. Cats are very stoic when they are ill, and often only slight changes in behavior are all you will see – even for life threatening problems.

If you are bringing home a cat for the first time, consider these guidelines when you set up the litter box. If you already have a cat that doesn't use the box regularly, the following points may help you find out what is wrong with the box and fix the situation.

Before we begin, please note that failure to properly use the litter box can have many causes. It could be, and often is, related to a medical problem, most commonly Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disease. So, if your cat stops using the litter box, your first step must be a visit to the vet. Male cats especially are at risk. In fact, an untreated urinary tract blockage can cause death in as short of time period as 24 hours. It is imperative to rule out health issues first when a cat eliminates outside of the litterbox when he usually uses it.

Remember that your cat is never to blame for litter box problems. Never punish a cat for not using the box! Don't shout at the cat and definitely don't smack her or rub her nose in the mess! This may work for dogs, but it definitely does not work for cats! With a cat, these steps will never solve the problem – in fact, they usually just make the problem worse, because now the cat no longer trusts you. Remember – cats are not socially motivated like dogs are.

## **Number and Types of Boxes**

The rule of thumb is one box per cat. So in a multi-cat household you will probably need several boxes. Some cats don't mind sharing a box, as long as it is cleaned often enough, but others may be more particular.

In the past, the litter box used to be a simple plastic box with some variety of size and color. Today, litter boxes come in many shapes and sizes. Basically, there are three types of boxes available on the market:

- The classic uncovered box - Most cats will do just fine with this type of box, as long as it's large enough and clean. However, you need to keep the litter clean to avoid unwanted odors in your home. We've found that scented litter just makes the potential problem worse. Simply scooping to clean unscented litter works just fine – as long as you scoop twice a day. The problem with uncovered boxes is that the cats often scatter litter out of the box when covering their business.



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Many people solve this problem by placing the box on a mat that is larger than the box. This makes for easy clean-up.

- The Covered box - this type of box provides the cat with extra privacy (although some cats prefer to have an open view while being in the box). Many owners prefer the covered box because it keeps odors inside and can be more aesthetic. If you opt for a covered box, remember that what you can't smell outside the box, your cat has to endure when she walks in. So, don't forget to keep the covered box just as clean!
- Self-Cleaning Box - this kind of box seems to be a very good combination for both cat and owner. The cat benefits from a spotless box at all times and the owner enjoys an odorless litter box without having to do any manual scooping. These boxes are basically coverless as they spread little or no odor at all, but hoods are available, if your cat prefers privacy. The main drawback is cost - these boxes are much more expensive than regular boxes.

The choice of box depends on the preferences of the cat and owner. It's important to note that while many owners prefer the covered boxes, some cats refuse to use them. If your cat does not use her covered box properly, it's a good idea to take the top off, at least for a while.

### **Types of Litter**

Today there are a variety of litter types. Most types are clay based, but you can also find silica based litter and natural litters made from wood, recycled paper, citrus peels, corn cobs and more.

Some litters, clay based, silica or natural, are of the clumping type. This means that the cat's urine does not seep through the grains to the bottom of the box, but rather creates a clump of litter that can be scooped out of the box along with the feces. Clumping litter has the advantage of keeping the box clean of urine between litter changes, as long as you make sure all clumps are scooped out on a regular basis.

So, which is best for your cat? That is something for your cat to decide. Generally speaking, it seems that most cats have a preference for clumping litter, perhaps because it is made of fine grains. Some cats develop a preference for a particular type of litter for their own reasons. Certainly clumping litter is the easiest for the owners.

For most cats, litter preference becomes fixed at a relatively young age. That is why an abrupt change of litter can sometimes cause litter box avoidance. So, if you wish to try a new type of litter, make the change



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gradually - mix the old type with the new, increasing the amount of the new type each day, getting your cat used to the new litter over time.

### **Location**

For some cats, this may be the most important aspect of the litter box. The box needs to be located in a place that would provide the cat with privacy and a sense of security. At the same time, most cats like to have a good view of their surroundings when they are inside the box. To feel secure enough, they need to know that there is an unobstructed escape route from the litter box.

If you suspect your cat may have a problem with the location of her litter box, you may want to try adding another box somewhere else in the home. Place the new box in a different location - one that may be better suited to provide a sense of security - and see which box your cat prefers.

### **Cleanliness**

Cats are famous for their sense of hygiene and most have high standards for the litter box. You should scoop any visible waste from the litter box at least once a day. Some cats are so fastidious, they need their box to be cleaned after every use - in which case you may want to invest in an automatic self-cleaning box to help you maintain a state of perfect cleanliness.

Cleanliness is also important when a cat urinates outside of the litterbox. First and foremost, a vet needs to be consulted to rule out health issues. Regardless of whether the cause is health or behavior related, it is imperative for you to completely clean the area, including the smell, with an enzymatic cleaner. If the cat can still smell urine, they will freshen up the mark about every three days. Do not use bleach or ammonia. Concentrated bleach can make a cat sick, and ammonia smells so similar to cat urine that it will do more harm than good.

### **Stability and Routine**

Cats are creatures of habit and any change in their litter box may cause litter box problems. Be careful when you need to change the type of box, the type of litter, location or any other feature associated with the box and make changes gradually.

Remember - litter box problems can have many causes, medical or behavioral. Getting the right box is a prerequisite, but it's not always enough. If your cat develops litter box problems, first consult your vet.





## Tips for Keeping Your Indoor Cat Happy

by Anne Moss

### **Indoor or Outdoor**

These days almost every cat organization, breeder, or guide will tell you to keep your cat as an indoor pet only. Indeed, the outside world is often hostile toward cats. Dangers include catfights, dog attacks, abuse, car accidents, infectious diseases (feline Leukemia, Feline Immune Deficiency Virus, Distemper, Rabies, etc.), and more. Cats that are allowed outside invariably get intestinal worms, and run the threat of Lyme disease borne by Deer Ticks. If your cat is not a “working” cat and is a pet, it is far safer to keep your cat indoors only. There are many things you can do to provide a happy life for your indoor friend.

### **Tips and Suggestions**

If you decide to keep your cat as an indoor-only cat, have a look at these suggestions. They can help you provide stimuli to enrich your cat’s life, reduce his stress and keep him safe.

- Keeping plenty of toys around the house will keep your kitty busy and add interest to what he may find to be otherwise unstimulating surroundings. Keep the toys in a special box, inaccessible to the cat, and rotate between toys so that you can offer different toys every week. Cats do get bored with the same toys day in and day out.
- Vertical space is very important for cats and contributes to a feeling of larger territory. Give your cat places to climb on, such as tall cat furniture or a cat gym. Make your home a fun place for kitty!
- A window to the outside world can provide hours of fascinating street watching (and with luck, bird watching as well). Provide your cat with a comfortable and safe window perch to enjoy this hobby. Watching outside the window is like TV for cats! Even falling leaves are interesting.
- Supervised walks outside can be a beneficial experience for many cats. Always use a lead and a proper cat harness - attaching a lead directly to a collar may harm the cat’s delicate neck and shoulder bones. You will need to put time and patience into training the cat to walk in a harness and lead, but it could be well worth the effort. Remember – cats are territory oriented. So you may have to start on just the top step, slowly working your way out.
- Hunting for food is a great form of feline entertainment. You don’t have to get real mice or birds for your cat - there is a good alternative. You can get special toys that hold food inside them and

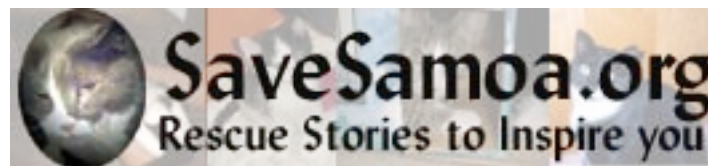


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dispense the treats as it rolls around. This can provide your cat with a long and enjoyable chase after the food.

- Hunting games. Simply hide a few treats in fairly easy to get-at places in your home (don't want kitty digging up the carpet!) before you leave for work in the morning. This stimulates your cat to do what he does best – patrol his territory and hunt for food.
- If you live in a house, you may want to consider building an external enclosure, where your cat can enjoy the atmosphere of the outdoors with the safety of the indoor

Don't forget that even a strictly indoor cat may sometimes wander outside by mistake. Always have your cat, or even kitten, wear a "break-away" collar with a clear tag that says "INDOOR CAT" with your name and your name and telephone number. An alternative is to have your vet "microchip" your cat. Most shelters, animal control agents and Vets look for these chips on captured stray cats.



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