How to Resolve a Litter Box Problem

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There are many reasons why cats won't use a litter box. When you resolve your own litter box issue, it is important to get to the root of the problem and not try to make changes piecemeal or try to resolve problems based on assumptions. The tips below should steer you in the right direction when addressing any litter box issue.

- **If there are any cat interactions that cause one or more cats to be anxious, this should be addressed.** Often this is directly related to a litter box problem or can make it much worse.
- **Make sure to have your cat medically checked for urinary infections** whenever there is a litter box issue. If a cat experiences any pain or discomfort when using a litter box, s/he will avoid it and try to go elsewhere.
- **Determine if this is a litter box avoidance issue** relating to the box itself, size, shape, or the litter type. Then determine if location may be a problem.
- **Cats like: Large litter boxes (about 6″ in height). A large, but shallow sweater box or plastic storage container will work well. Open, not covered.** The box should be large enough for a kitty see what is in there, turn around, dig and cover. Your cat should be able to easily see over the sides and turn around. High sided boxes can make this problematic (No plastic tubs). If your cat is scratching outside of the box, scratching on the side of the walls, or not digging or covering, the box is probably too small or too dirty, or both. The smaller the box, the dirtier it gets. If there is more than one cat, this is even more of an issue.
- **Cats are clean creatures. They like clean boxes.** Clumping litter is best for hygiene since you can remove the urine. Ideally, clean the box by scooping out urine and feces multiple times a day, just as you would flush a toilet. Minimally, once in the morning, once in the afternoon or when you return from work, and once before you go to bed. Make it a routine and it won't be so complicated.
- **Unscented litter is a must.** Avoid scented litters. Cats dislike perfume-y litters. Most cat litters that are perfumed do not cover up odors anyway.
- **Cats prefer small, sandy type litter.** Fine clay litter works well. Feline pine, tea leaves, paper, or large crystal granules are not preferred substrates for cats.
- **Make sure the box is in a good location. Cats like some privacy, at the same time, they also like to see entries and exits and have nice landscape views of surroundings.** If a cat is nervous or anxious, if there is a lot of activity, or if there are inter-cat dynamics that might be stressful, this becomes incredibly important, i.e., placing the litter box at a corner of the basement, with one entry/exit when there are inter-cat issues, such as where one cat avoids or chases another, is a set up for failure.

- **Cats like more than one box. Often cats like to pee and poop in separate locations/boxes.** In addition, if the box is dirty, they do not want to go in it again, so will use the clean one. If cats share boxes, this becomes even more important. Likewise, if you live on multiple floors, there should be a litter box on each floor or, at least, be very easily accessible without your kitty having to wander to the far end of the corner of the house each time he or she has to go.

- **Use the right cleaner.** If your kitty urinates away from the box in other locations, you must do your best to eliminate the odors. The smell of urine can attract more urination. Use an 'enzymatic' cleaner and stay away from commercial products such as Febreze, Woolite, or simple carpet deodorizers. These will mask the smell but not neutralize the odor.

- **Do not use vinegar or ammonia based cleaners since ammonia** is a component of urine and the use of vinegar will not deter further urination. When using enzyme cleaners, remove the urine with paper towels, add a little bit of hot water, if it is an old stain, and pour the cleaner on straight. Let enzyme cleaners air dry.

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About Author

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