

Housetraining cats and kittens

Actually, almost no training is required to get your new cat or kitten to use his litterbox. Mother Nature pretty much took care of that for you when she gave cats the innate desire to dig and bury their waste. But what you do need to do is carefully cooperate with him to make sure he continues to do this. Once a cat or kitten has developed undesirable toilet habits, it is sometimes very difficult to get him to change his ways. Here are some suggestions that will help keep your cat or kitten using his litterbox.

- Pick a good location for the litterbox. For a tiny kitten, that means very close by. Make sure your pet knows where the box is. Gently put him in the box several times while you're getting acquainted. It's probably a good idea to actually confine a kitten to the room where his box is for a few days. Pick a reasonably secluded location for the box; most cats like a little privacy. Don't put the box too close to his food as cats often resist going to the bathroom in the same area where they eat. Finally, don't place the box near something like a washing machine or a noisy furnace that might scare your cat and discourage him from returning to that spot. Try to look at things from his point of view when selecting a location for his box.
- What you put in his box is also important. Some cats are not fussy, but others will refuse to use the organic, pelletized litters or any litter which has been scented with perfumes or deodorizers. Your best bet is a plain, unscented clay litter or one of the newer "clumping" litters. Once you have found a litter that seems to please your cat, don't switch to another kind just because it's on sale. The usual recommendation is to use about a two inch layer of litter in the box, although some cats may prefer a thinner layer.
- Keep the litterbox clean! Solid wastes and wet clumps should be scooped out daily. The entire box should be emptied, washed with soap and water and refilled at least once a week, perhaps twice. Don't use strong smelling cleaners which may leave odors that discourage your cat from using the box. Adding a layer of litter to a dirty box is no substitute for cleaning the box.
- A baby kitten should have a box with low sides he can hop over easily. When your cat grows larger, you will probably need to get a larger, deeper box to prevent urinating or defecating over the side.
- Covered litterboxes are easier to keep clean, but cats seem to have different reactions to them, and you need to be alert for problems. Some shy cats prefer a covered box, but others (especially big cats who may feel a covered box is too crowded) seem reluctant to use them. If you don't want to buy a cover, you can make one from a cardboard box.
- If you already have a cat, it's best to get the new cat or kitten a litterbox of his own; cats can be very finicky about using a box another cat has used.

The great majority of cats will maintain good toilet habits their entire lives and cause no problems if you follow the above suggestions. However, if your cat does develop a problem you should call your veterinarian immediately to discuss possible medical causes. If it is determined that there is no medical problem, ask your veterinarian or the Animal Humane Society for suggestions about other steps to take before a bad habit becomes entrenched.

