

# Litter Box Use

Puddles of urine, stains on the carpet, and feces in the bathtub -- many pet owners deal with such nuisances on a daily basis. In fact, litter box issues are the most common behavior problems that occur among cats.

If you find urine on the walls, near windows or doors, or on vertical surfaces, your cat may be marking his territory. Whether male, female, spayed, neutered, or intact, any cat at any age can start spraying urine to do this. The problem may be triggered by other animals in the house or animals your cat sees outside.

If the problem occurs on rugs, laundry, beds, or just outside the litter box, the problem may be the box or its surroundings. Your cat may no longer like where the litter box is located or how it feels, or your cat may have been scared while using it. Or, it could be a combination of these things.

Regardless of what you think the cause may be, take these few steps before throwing in the scooper.

## **1. Get the cat to the vet.**

Urinary tract infections and other medical-related issues are common culprits in litter box issues. Talk to your veterinarian right away to rule out this cause.

## **2. Remove the smell.**

Cats are attracted to soiling in locations where they smell urine or feces. If the smell is partially removed, the cat will probably be triggered to “refresh” the spot. By completely removing the stain, you will eliminate the trigger to soil there again.

When cleaning, be sure to not use common household cleaners, especially ones containing ammonia. Instead, use specialized enzymatic cleansers, which can be purchased in pet supply stores or online. If the stain is already dry, soak the spot with luke-warm water and blot it as much as possible. Next, treat the area with the commercial enzymatic cleanser, following manufacturer’s instructions. Repeat this process three times.

## **3. Create the ideal kitty commode.**

### **Location**

Make sure the box is easy to find, especially for elderly cats. If your home has multiple levels, provide a box on each level. Additionally, do not place boxes near noisy appliances like washing machines or heating units that may frighten your cat. Avoid

moving the box, as many cats do not like change. If you must move the box for some reason, try slowly moving it one foot per day toward the desired location.

### **Scent**

Avoid scented litters, cleaning with bleach or heavily scented products, and do not spray your box with an air freshener. This may smell great to you, but can be a deterrent to your cat. Instead, scoop the box at least daily and wash with dish detergent weekly.

### **The Litter**

Avoid litter box liners and large size litter pieces, such as crystals or pellets. Instead, choose soft, fine grain, clumping litter that is unscented. You may want to offer more than one box, each with a different brand of litter, to let your cat choose which type she likes best. Disposable cardboard boxes can be helpful when trying this. Also, slope the litter so it is about 1/2" deep on one end and about 3" deep on the other. This will help you find the depth of litter your cat prefers. Finally, once you find a litter your cat likes – stick with it! Changing litter brands can upset cats and result in refusal to use the box.

### **The Box**

Most cats prefer large, uncovered boxes. Others like smaller boxes or covered boxes. Offer your kitty a variety of boxes so they can choose which they like best. If you are using a covered box, make sure the opening doesn't face the wall so your cat won't feel trapped. Also, the general rule of paw is to have one more box than the number of cats.

## **4. Contact a professional**

If you have tried all of the above and your litter box blues are not resolved, it is probably time to consult with a professional.