



## House Training Your Cat

By Brenda F. Barnette, CEO

Housetraining a new kitten or cat is more a matter of helping them start off on the right paw in your home. Instinctively, cats have a desire to keep themselves clean and will look for a way to dig and bury their waste. So all you need to do is cooperate with their desire to do the right thing, in the right place.

**Pick a good location for the litter box.** For a kitten this means very close by. It is often a good idea to confine a kitten or a new cat for a few days to a small, get-acquainted room with a cozy bed, food & water bowls, and her toys on one side of the room and her litter box on the other side. Visit her often and gently put her in the litter box several times a day, especially after eating.

For adult cats and real estate, location is everything! Cats like their privacy and their litter box placed in a consistent location. Do not place the litter box in a noisy, heavy-traffic location, or next to the washing machine, or in the middle of a cold garage. If you have a multiple-story house, you should have a litter box on each level. If you have a multiple cat family, it's ideal if you can have a box for each cat.

Most cats will maintain good litter box habits their entire lives. If your cat begins to use places other than the litter box, you should call your veterinarian. Some medical conditions can cause a change in a cat's litter box habits.

**It's all about scratching.** Some cats are finicky about types of litter, although most are not and generic litter is usually fine. In fact, all cats really need is to be able to get a scratching sensation. Years ago when I worked in veterinarian hospitals and later when I had my own boarding kennels, we used small pie-pans as litter boxes in which we put about a tablespoon of litter. These were changed with each use. We found that the cats would scratch and scratch and scratch, but rarely missed their pan. They knew what a little place to scratch meant.

**Keep the litter box clean!** Your cat needs to have a clean box with fresh litter. The litter box should contain about 1½ - 2 inches of fresh litter and solid wastes should be scooped out once or twice daily. Depending on the litter, you will need to completely change and wash the litter box regularly. Clean the container with soap and water with some added vinegar or lemon juice to neutralize the urine odors. A thin layer of baking soda in the bottom of the litter box will also help absorb odors without repelling your cat.

Depending on the litter box location and the cat, a covered or an uncovered box may work best in your house. Using a covered box can help control the odor in your home, offers added privacy for your cat, and is very helpful for cats with poor aim.

Once you have a brand of litter, the type of box, and the location your cat likes, avoid making sudden changes. If you want to change the litter, try mixing in the old brand for a few days with the new as a way of making a smooth transition.

House cats are clean and wonderful pets suitable for large homes in the country or tiny apartments in the city. Once you have established a consistent litter box routine, you are bound to enjoy many years of great feline companionship!