



Wausau Animal Hospital

Litterbox Training

Contrary to popular belief, mother cats do not teach their kittens to use the litter box. Kittens begin to dig in and use dirt and dry, loose material at about 4 weeks old without ever having observed their mothers doing so. This natural instinct is used in training kittens to use the litter box. Begin as soon as the new kitten arrives in your home.

Buy the largest litter box you can find; your kitten will soon grow into a cat, and will appreciate having the room. Make sure at least one side is low enough that your kitten can easily climb in and out of the box. And make sure the box is in a spot that is easy to get to. (These are also important considerations for a geriatric cat, who may have limited mobility.) Place the box away from heavy traffic and loud distracting noises so the cat can have privacy. If it becomes necessary to move the box, make the change gradually, moving it step by step.

If the kitten was trained to use a litter box by her previous owner, use the same type of box and litter. A kitten who has been living outside may need dirt or sand in the litter box at first, as that is what she is accustomed to using. Gradually replace the dirt with more and more litter, until you have completely switched over. This method works for switching the litter for any cat.

Place the kitten in the litter box after a nap, a meal, a play session, and whenever your kitten appears inclined to urinate or defecate. Praise her when she goes. If mistakes occur, pick up the kitten and set her down in the box. Do not discipline just before placing the kitten in the box. The kitten will associate any reprimand with being placed in the litter box and will assume the litter box is the wrong place to go.

Never rub cat's nose in a mess or bring her over to it for a reprimand. She will have no idea why she is being reprimanded, but she may be inclined to eliminate in hidden spots (such as behind the sofa) to avoid another reprimand.

When your kitten is still learning to use the box, leave a tiny bit of urine or feces behind in the box, so the scent will remind her what the box is for. As soon as she is using the box reliably (and this could be as quickly as a day or two) remove all liquid and solid waste regularly. Scoop out solid material once or twice a day, and stir the litter to keep the surface dry. If you are using a clumping litter, scoop the liquid wastes at the same time. Change nonclumping litter every week-more often if necessary. Change clumping litter as soon as you notice that the box has even the slightest odor after you have scooped. Wash the box thoroughly and let it dry completely before adding fresh litter.

Kitty Litter

The choice of litter is very important to your cat. The ideal litter is as dust-free as possible, unscented, absorbent, and easy to dispose of. Dust can be a serious problem for cats because they are digging in the litter and can inhale dust, leading to respiratory problems. This is especially problematic in enclosed litter boxes-which many cats don't like, either.

While scenting the litter makes the humans feel good, the smell may be overpowering to the cat, who will choose to retain urine or eliminate elsewhere.

Clumping litter is often preferable because it is easier to remove all solid and liquid waste from the box daily. Discussions have been held about the dangers of cats licking granules of clumping litter off their feet, but no case of a cat being harmed as the result of ingesting clumping litter has ever been verified.

It is important to place litter boxes in relatively quiet areas that are easily accessible to the cat. Litter should be scooped at least once every day and the boxes thoroughly cleaned weekly. Ideally, you should have one litter box per cat in the household, plus a spare. They should not all be in the same room.