

Litter Box Care and Maintenance

Urinating and defecating outside of the litter box, also known as “inappropriate elimination,” is a very common problem and a frequent reason for cats to be relinquished to a shelter. In most cases, this is due to the pet parent not maintaining the litter box in the same way they flush their own toilets. Due to cats’ instinctive desire to be clean, it’s understandable that a litter box not up to their preferences would be unattractive to them.

Top reasons for a cat to stop using the litter box:

- Dirty litter box(es)
- Poor location of litter box(es)
- Too few boxes
- Unable to relax and get to the box, or use it, due to stressors in the house environment
- Medical problem(s) - **This should always be a serious consideration.**
- Poor choice of litter
- Box size is too small
- Blocked from the box by a dominant feline housemate

These are things that you should do for your feline family members’ litter box:

- Scoop the litter box twice daily - at a minimum (2-3 item rule).
 - The ‘2-3 item’ rule means that the litter box is considered dirty by cats when there are 2 or 3 “items” in it, and it should be scooped. If your work schedule does not allow this, then you should add more litter boxes.
- Use clumping litter – for cats 8 weeks of age or older.
 - The purpose of clumping litter is to be able to remove the urine clumps and feces intact and completely. Therefore the litter needs to be **deep** enough so that you can get the scooper **under** the waste so that it does not stick to the bottom of the litter box.
 - Clumping litter comes in several forms such as clay, corn, wheat, and pine. There are pros and cons to all of them, but cats’ first choice is basic **clumping clay** litter. It is the closest to sand, which is most preferred by cats.
 - Examples of recommended clumping clay litters (in no particular order):
 - [Dr Elsey’s Precious Cat Ultra Unscented Clumping Clay](#)
 - [Premium Choice Carefree Kitty unscented Solid Scoop](#)
 - The loose litter in the big bin at Petco. For the Petco brand you need to purchase an original container of the product and then return with that empty container for (cheaper) re-fills.
- Keep the litter deep enough.
 - Litter should be 3 1/2-4 inches deep. Using strong clumping litter and scooping carefully will keep your litter cleaner longer. But because clay absorbs odors, regardless of being in a clump, it is recommended to completely change the litter (and clean the litter box itself) every 30-60 days.
- Use large litter boxes. (See last page for examples)
 - Many commercial litter boxes are too small, and lead to cats having to step in their own waste. This can result in a litter box aversion. The bigger the box, the more inviting it will be to your cat, and therefore, the more s/he will be willing to use it. Large plastic storage containers can be converted into appropriately sized litter boxes.
- Have enough litter boxes available.
 - The rule of thumb is 1 litter box per cat in the household, plus 1. If you have large litter boxes that are scooped regularly and kept clean, then you can be fine with using fewer litter boxes.

- Some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another. However, they don't usually exclusively use one box for urination and one for defecation; they switch off.
 - A common cause of inappropriate elimination stems from a more dominant cat blocking the pathway to the litter box. In this situation it is critical to have enough boxes in 'safe' areas to minimize the potential for problems.
- Have litter boxes placed in a quiet area.
 - The laundry room is often *not* a suitable place due to the noise from the washer and dryer and has led to many litter box aversion cases. An area near the water heater or furnace is also inappropriate.
 - It is best to not place litter boxes near the cat's eating area.
 - Replace cat boxes every 6 months to a year. The plastic degrades and cats don't like the smell.

VERY IMPORTANT: If your cat is getting in and out of the litter box and is unable to pass any urine, or is looking like he is distressed and wanting to urinate outside the box, this is a MEDICAL EMERGENCY! A cat with a blockage of the urinary tract can rupture his bladder within 24 hours resulting in death. You may also notice a blocked cat or one with cystitis licking the genital area frequently.

These are things that you should not do regarding litter box care:

- DO NOT use litters that do not clump - except for kittens younger than 7 - 8 weeks of age or following a surgery as directed by your veterinarian.
- DO NOT use scented litters or any deodorizers.
 - Always use unscented litters and do not add any deodorizers to the litter or around the litter box. Scented litters often put off cats, because of their extremely keen sense of smell.
 - **There is absolutely NO need for special perfumes or additives if a cat box is maintained correctly. The best way to keep the box odor free is to clean it!**
- DO NOT use hooded litter boxes if your intent is to prevent odors from reaching your nose.
- DO NOT use plastic liners, which can bother the cat when they get their claws stuck in them. If you maintain a clean box, they are unnecessary.
- DO NOT use plastic 'grass' mats.
- DO NOT punish your cat for not using the litter box.
- DO NOT put a child in charge of litter box maintenance.

Conclusion

It is much easier to **prevent** an inappropriate elimination problem with low carbohydrate canned or homemade diet and sound litter box practices than it is to fix it once it starts. Not all of the issues that cause cats to stop using the litter box are within our control, but there are many steps you can take to make their litter box clean and appealing.

Thinking outside the (cat) box!

Examples of storage bins that can be converted into litter boxes:

Sterilite 120 Qt./30 gallon storage bin. (see picture below)

Dimensions: 30.5”L x 20.25”W x 16.6”H

Search [Target.com for “Sterilite 30 gallon”](#) for more product information

Sterilite 72 Qt./18 gallon storage bin (for if space is an issue)

Dimensions: 23.6”L x 18.4”W x 14.8”H

Search [Target.com for “Sterilite 18 gallon”](#) for more product information



Above is Alice’s litter box and litter mat for her cat Jack.

Possible tools to use to cut the bin:

Box cutter (Recommended)

Hand saw



*****BE VERY CAREFUL WHEN CUTTING STORAGE BINS*****

- ✓ The plastic can crack if you are too fast or forceful!
- ✓ The lip around the top is the hardest part to cut through.
- ✓ Trace your opening before you begin cutting.
- ✓ Make opening at least 6-8 in. from the bottom to allow appropriate litter depth.
- ✓ Smooth the cut plastic edges with sand paper, a file or a quick pass of a lighter.