

Our Animal Friends

by Martha Norwalk



What Cats Need, Part 3

When I was growing up, all of our cats were indoor/outdoor models. They were free to go outside whenever they wanted. Because of that, they did all of their potty business outside. Given the choice, most cats prefer that.

Even though our cats preferred to eliminate out of doors, my mom always kept a couple of clean litterboxes available for them, one in each bathroom of our house. If any of our cats had an emergency and really had to go and could not get outside, the litter boxes were always there. Mom was brilliant and she loved animals. She already knew what it took me years to figure out: "Dogs have masters, cats have staff." Thanks, Mom!

It is so important to remember that to be successful with cats, you must consider them equal or higher in the household pecking order. You must be willing to serve them properly. In no other area is this philosophy more important than when dealing with their bathroom habits. Especially since nowadays more and more cat owners are choosing to keep their cat friends indoors all the time because it just is not safe in most areas to let them roam free.

Even if you allow your cat outdoor privileges, I still agree with my mom and think it is best to provide an indoor litterbox, just in case. It is also important to note that even cats that have gone to the bathroom outdoors all of their lives may prefer to go indoors as they get older.

There are many different styles of cat litter-

boxes and lots of different types of cat litter available. Cats are as individual as humans are so they may have their own preferences. What you want and think is best may not be acceptable to your cat. If you have multiple cats, you may need to have different accommodations for each cat.

I am going to share with you what I have found over the years to work the best in most circumstances. Keep in mind here that I am speaking in generalities and I have always been a fan of "If it ain't broke, don't fix it." So, if you have a litterbox set up that is working for you and your cat but it is not what I recommend, please know, that is okay and you do not need to change anything unless a problem develops.

The most common reasons cats do not use their boxes and therefore inappropriately urinate or defecate in the house are: the box is not clean enough, the box not big enough, the box not convenient or safe. They also may have an issue with the style of box or the type of litter.

With inappropriate urination, there is always the possibility of a urinary tract infection. Having your vet check a urine specimen is recommended.

Some cats don't care if their box is dirty and they will use it no matter how bad it gets, and then there are the very clean models that won't use a box if it has already been used. Err on the side of the clean cat here and always scoop and stir each box at least

once or twice a day.

Be sure to use enough litter. Three to five inches is best, depending on the size of the box. If you use enough litter and scoop and stir regularly, you should not have to totally dump and change the litter very often. Just add to it as the level goes down.

I recommend using a higher quality, all-natural type of litter. There are many to choose from. I do not use or recommend any clay type litters containing silica dust as that has been known to cause severe and sometimes life-threatening health issues for some cats and many kittens.

My general rule of thumb is one box per cat plus one (yes, there is a limit here if you have lots of cats), and there should be a litterbox on each floor of the house. That covers the convenience factor. Most cats prefer open, uncovered boxes with no liners.

According to the only research

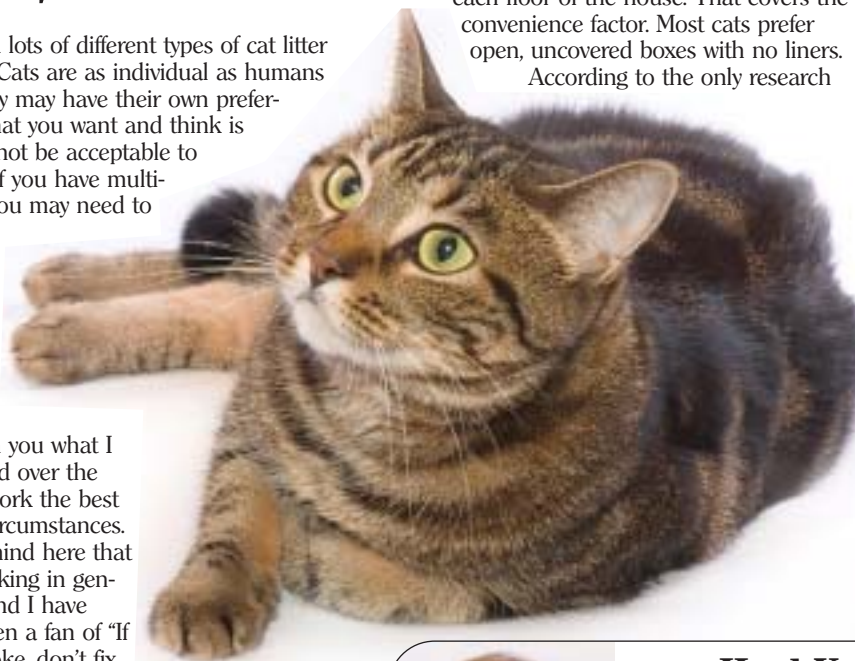
project on this subject that I know about, most cat boxes are not big enough, and I agree. They recommended a box be 28 by 32 inches. That is huge and nobody makes a cat litterbox that large. My favorite boxes are mortar mixing tubs from Home Depot. These are seasonal items and you cannot always get them during the winter months. They come in two sizes, the large being similar measurements to the above recommendation and the smaller one is still larger than any pet store options. They are also very inexpensive and are made of black plastic.

If you do not have space to accommodate one of these boxes, get the biggest box you do have room for. Hint: the smaller the boxes, the more frequently you must clean them.

In multiple cat households or cat and dog families, safety while going can be a big factor. Make sure your feline friend cannot be cornered, trapped, or pounced on going into or coming out of their potty area.

Lastly, in the cat world, the restaurant and toilet are two totally different and separate areas. Therefore, it is not a good idea to feed your cat next to or in close proximity to the litterbox. Separate rooms for these activities is preferred.

Martha Norwalk is an animal behavior therapist and host of Martha Norwalk's Animal World, Sunday mornings, from 9 a.m. to noon on Alternative Talk AM 1150. She can be reached at Martha's Canine, Feline and All Creature Counseling at 206-525-2016 or www.marthanorwalk.com. To purchase a set of Martha's canine behavior modification tapes or to make an appointment for her to work with you and your animal friend, give her a call.



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