

Litter Box Success

Cats are individuals and, while some will use their litter box regardless of the set-up, many have specific preferences and require certain conditions in order to use it consistently. It is important to set your cat up for success in their new home regardless of their history with the litter box. Here are some recommendations to help you get started:

- **When introducing your new cat into the home, confine them to one room with their food, water, bed, and litter box.** If the room they are staying in is small, one litter box should suffice, but if it is larger, we recommend two or more. The cat should remain in this room until they have used the litter box(es) consistently for at least one week. When they show an interest in leaving the room, you can begin to slowly let them out to explore the rest of the home. This should be a slow process, and time out of their room should be supervised. If you have other animals in the home, check out the handout on introducing your new cat to resident animals for more details on how to facilitate proper introductions.
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- **The rule of thumb for how many litter boxes you should have is: one per cat in the household, plus one.** It is necessary to have extra litter boxes because some cats prefer to defecate in one and urinate in another, or don't like to share their box with other felines. We recommend that the litter boxes be uncovered and *at least* 22" x 16" for an adult cat.
 - **Place extra litter boxes in accessible locations where the cat will not be disturbed by children or other animals.** Additionally, if your house has several stories, each floor should have its own box. By providing your cat with more options, you increase the likelihood that they will use the litter box. It is important to ensure that the boxes are in quiet areas, as noisy spots near washing machines, furnaces, or under stairs may frighten them. Cats also prefer to go to the bathroom away from their food and water, so make sure that the box isn't near their dishes. Once you have decided on the placement of the litter boxes, it is best not to move them.
 - **Use an unscented, sand-like scoopable litter** – we recommend choosing a brand that clumps into a firm ball, as it makes cleaning the box much easier. It is important not to use scented litter, as perfumed, chemical smells tend to repel cats.
 - **We do not recommend using covered or hooded litter boxes** because they can be quite frustrating to cats. They trap the odor inside, which creates an unpleasant smell, and also do not allow the cat to easily escape should they need to. Litter box liners are also discouraged, as some felines find them irritating.
 - The most common reason why a cat stops using their litter box is because it is not being cleaned properly. **Litter boxes should be scooped at least once per day** and fully washed if soiled. Even if your cat is very tidy, it is



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important to always wash the box a minimum of one time each month with hot water and unscented dishwashing liquid. Do not use harsh chemicals that will leave a lingering odor.

- Cats find consistent routines and predictable environments very comforting, so try to keep them on a schedule. Playtimes, mealtimes, and bedtime should occur at approximately the same time every day. **The less stress your cat experiences, the less likely they are to have litter box issues.**

If your cat is avoiding the litter box after following these recommendations, check out the handout on Solving Litter Box Problems. Don't hesitate to contact the Wisconsin Humane Society behavior team at asktheexpert@wihumane.org or 414-431-6173 if you have any questions along the way!