

Cat Litter Box Solutions

Cats are very clean animals, especially with their litter box habits. If a cat isn't using their litter box there is a good reason. There are many causes for cats going to the bathroom out of the box. Urinating outside the box is one of the main reasons cats are surrendered to shelters. The majority of the time, this problem can be easily remedied. Fortunately the problem can usually be solved with a trip to the veterinarian or a little detective work.



UPAWS adopted cat Oliver developed a Urinary tract infection (UTI) most likely due to stress or separation anxiety. An immediate trip to the vet, some antibiotics and a simple change in diet and Ollie is right back on track, healthy and happy.

Here are some of the reasons why your cat might stop using the litter box and solutions:

Cat is ill –urinary tract infection (UTI): This is the number one cause of cats having litter box issues. There are many things that can cause UTI's: feeding low-quality cat food, the cat is not drinking enough water, cat is ingesting things it shouldn't (garbage, plants, things from outside) stress, etc. A UTI is very painful and is especially dangerous to male cats. A UTI can be fatal. You should bring your cat to the vet immediately if you suspect a UTI and get him/her tested.

Cat is not spayed or neutered: Male cats especially tend to spray if they're not neutered and that increases if there are other cats in the house. Female cats sometimes spray too for the same reasons. So please get your cat fixed!

Cat was recently declawed: After being declawed, even if you use the special litter from the vet; it may hurt your cat's paws to step into, and dig, in the litter box, making them not want to use it anymore. If that's the case then try an even softer litter, there are some pine types or even shredded paper, until your cat gets used to the litter box again and heals completely. Declawing, in addition to being painful, is also very stressful for your cat and stress can cause changes in litter box habits. Please consider all alternatives before declawing your cat. UPAWS can help you with alternatives to declawing and advice.

The Litter Box is Dirty: Some cats will refuse to use a litter box that is dirty resulting in bathroom accidents around the house. Keep the box scooped at a minimum of twice a day.

Difficulties Sharing a Litter Box with Other Cats: You should have at least as many litter boxes as you have cats plus one. That way, none of them will ever be prevented from using the litter box because it's already occupied. Place litter boxes in several locations around the house so that no one cat can prevent the other cats from getting access.

Type of Litter box and Litter: The size of the litter box is very important. If you have a large cat that tends to urinate over the side of the litter box or one who enthusiastically kicks litter, there are several high-sided litter boxes on the market. If you can't find one large enough, consider using a plastic storage container and cut out an entrance (or a U) on one end for your cat to provide easy access. Most cats prefer unscented litter. Please remember, don't abruptly change your cats litter because you feel like it, or a different kind is on sale...cats are creatures of habit, and problems may occur.

Cat is Upset About a Recent Life Change or Event: Stress can be a major cause of inappropriate elimination in cats of all ages. Separation anxiety, moving, changes in routine, new family members, divorce, strange cats in your yard, smell of strange cats on owners clothing...all can result in inappropriate elimination. Reducing these stressors, or decreasing their impact on the household, will benefit your cat.

There is a wonderful book by Pam Johnson Bennett titled, "Think Like a Cat", which has numerous ways to help reduce your cats stress as well as solutions to common cat behaviors. There are terrific products called Feliway® and Feliway Comfort Zone Plug-In's® which are designed to help reduce anxiety in cats and in turn decrease spraying or urinating inappropriately. Feliway® contains pheromones from the cat's face or mouth area. Pheromones are chemicals which are used to communicate with other members of the cat family. Cats won't urinate around their "nests", so the theory goes that the cat smells the Feliway® and associates it with "nest". Feliway® has been known to be very successful in rehabilitating cats., including several of my own cats.

Clean the Areas Thoroughly with the Correct Products: Make sure to clean up the spots where they urinated immediately and really well with a pet stain and odor destroyer. Most pet stores carry some very good products, such as Natures' Miracle®, that get the smell out. You don't want your cat to keep urinating after the fact because he/she still smells the same old smell.

And last but not least, DO NOT punish your cat. Punishing your cat such as yelling, chasing or rubbing his/her nose in the soiled area will NOT help, and will probably increase the stress on your cat. Punishment is not the answer, nor is banishing your cat outdoors or immediately giving up on him/her. Think outside the box and be a detective to find the solutions. For long-standing or complex situations, contact your vet or an animal behaviorist who has experience working with cats. UPAWS can also offer advice and help.