

Litter Training Your Cat/Kitten

Most adult cats will naturally seek out a sandy, granular place to eliminate, but young kittens might need a little help figuring out proper litter box habits.

When litter training kittens, there are a few things you can do to help set your kitten up for success.

Here are some cat potty training tips on when to start, how to choose litter boxes, how to pick the right type of litter, how and where to set up the litter boxes, and how to help your kitten master the litter box.

When to Start Litter Training Kittens

In the first few weeks after birth, mother cats stimulate their kittens to eliminate, and they clean them up afterward. During that time, kittens don't need litter boxes.

You can start litter training kittens at around 4 weeks of age by offering kitten-friendly litter boxes. This coincides with the time that kittens start weaning.

If you adopt an older kitten or adult cat, you can start litter box training as soon as you bring them home. You will need the right cat potty training supplies to be set up before they come to their new home.

How to Litter Train Your Kitten or Cat

Follow these steps for cat potty training success.

Choose a Litter Box

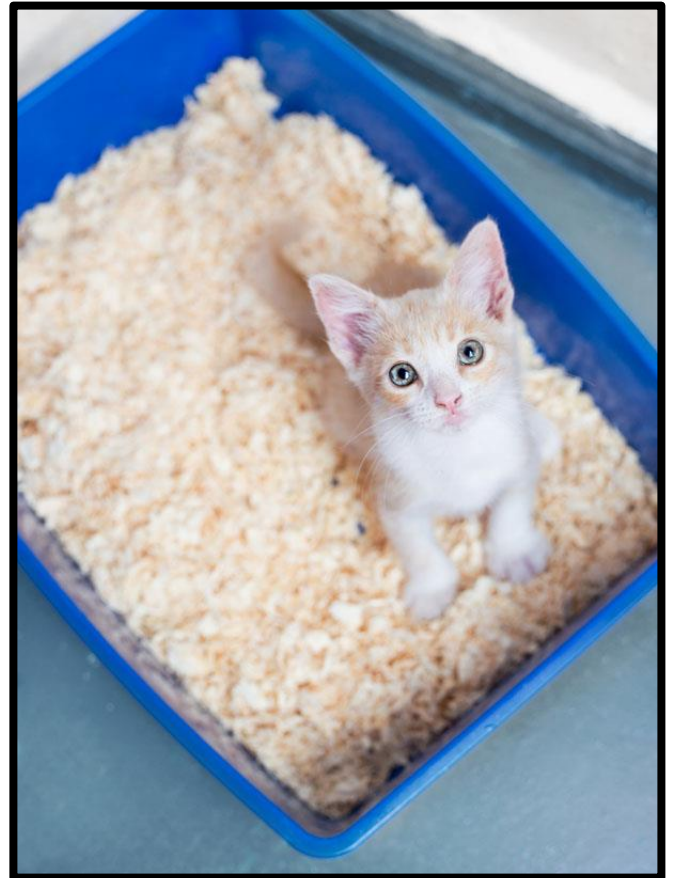
While deciding on a litter box may seem like a trivial task, it actually does make a big difference to your kitten.

Get the Right Size Litter Box

Full-size boxes may be too big and intimidating for a small kitten. Dr. Sally J. Foote, DVM, a feline behavior consultant certified by the International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants (IAABC), recommends a litter tray that is 13 by 9 inches for kittens.

If your cat is older or you have other adult cats in the home, they will need boxes that are full-size, while your kitten needs their smaller litter boxes to start with.

The litter box will need to grow with your kitten. Your cat's litter box should be approximately 1 1/2 times their length. You will need to size up as your kitten gets bigger.



Provide More Than One Litter Box

At a minimum, there should be one more litter box in your house than the number of cats. If you have two cats, there should be three boxes. If you have five cats, there should be at least six boxes.

Uncovered versus Covered Litter Boxes

Many cats prefer to use an uncovered box.

“In nature, cats don’t want to get caught by a predator inside an enclosed area,” says IAABC-certified cat behavior consultant Mieshelle Nagelschneider. Many of her clients believe that their cats prefer the privacy of a cover, but she says that “cats don’t want to feel trapped” when they use their litter box.



Whether or not your cat prefers a restroom with or without a roof comes down to your kitty’s personal preference, says Dr. Foote, who has found that some cats prefer an open space to eliminate, while others prefer an enclosed space.

Dr. Foote suggests giving your kitten a choice in the beginning to see what they prefer.

Pick the Right Type of Litter

Research has shown that most cats prefer fine-grain litters, presumably because they have a softer feel.

When it comes to clumping or non-clumping litters, cats have their own preferences. Of course, you might prefer clumping for the ease of scooping.

In terms of clay litter versus litter made from other materials, some cats will not use a box that has corn- or wheat-based litter because it smells like food, Nagelschneider says.

Try out a few types to make sure you get the type of litter that your kitten prefers.

Plan Where to Put the Litter Boxes

Litter box placement and availability can be a critical factor in encouraging your kitten to use the box.

Don’t Hide the Litter Boxes

If the boxes are all in the same corner, they are effectively one big box, which can lead to trouble if your kitties do not want to share.

It is tempting to put litter boxes in closets and corners because we don't want them to be visible, but this should be avoided. Remember that cats also do not like to feel cornered or trapped during toilet time.

They will also need some sort of light to see and find their boxes, so if there’s no ambient light in the place where you keep the litter box, try using a night-light, Nagelschneider says.

Avoid Distractions

Set up your kitten’s litter box in an area that has few things to distract them from getting down to business.

For kittens having trouble focusing, you may have to remove the option of having other “interesting” places to urinate. Try keeping your kitten in a small room without any rugs or carpeting and only a small amount of bedding to try and keep them focused until they master using the litter box.

Place Litter Boxes on Every Floor

The boxes should be spread out, with at least one on every floor of your home.

Make it easy for your cat to get to the litter boxes. “Don’t make them have to go down the stairs, through the playroom, through the kitty door, and into the utility room,” Nagelschneider says. “Cat’s don’t want to go any farther than we do to reach the bathroom.”

It’s particularly important to remember that your kitten will eventually become an adult cat, so putting a litter box up on a shelf or down many flights of stairs will make it much harder to get to when they are older and arthritic.

Introduce Your Kitten to the Litter Box

Once you have your supplies picked out and litter box areas set up, here is how you can help litter train your kitten.

Step 1: Show your kitten the locations of each litter box and let your kitten sniff them.

Step 2: Gently place your kitten in the litter box. They may instinctively start pawing at the litter or even using the litter box. If they do not, run your fingers through the clean litter to demonstrate the pawing action.

Step 3: If your kitten didn’t use one of the boxes in the initial introduction, try placing your kitten in one of the boxes each time they eat, drink, or wake up from a nap, until they begin using the box on their own.



Reinforce Good Litter Box Habits

When your kitten uses the litter box appropriately, reward them with their favorite treat to create a positive association with the activity.

For this to work, the treat must be given immediately after they have left the box so they associate the activity with the reward.

If your kitten makes a mistake, do NOT punish them or yell at them. Calmly clean up the mess with an enzymatic cleaner and do not react in any other way.

Keep the Litter Boxes Clean

Try to scoop your kitten’s litter box after every elimination. You don’t want your kitten developing an aversion to the box during the training process. After scooping, add some clean litter to maintain a litter depth of 2 to 3 inches to give your kitty plenty of room to dig.

Once your kitten is older and uses the litter box consistently, you can scoop daily instead of each time your kitten uses the box.

Periodically empty out all of the litter in each box, clean the boxes, and fill them with clean litter. Most non-scoop litters will have their own recommendations on the label for how frequently they should be changed.

Clumping litters only need to be changed out completely every week or couple of weeks, depending on how many cats you have using the boxes.

What to Do if Your Kitten Won't Use the Litter Box

If your kitten is having a hard time with litter box training and is peeing outside the box, try these steps:

1. Carefully evaluate your litter box setup. Every kitten has slightly different preferences. Make sure that the litter boxes:

Are easily accessible

Are located in quiet spots

Are not hidden in a corner

Are not being guarded by other cats

2. Consider changing the litter box or type of litter. You may want to get a new box (covered versus uncovered or one with low sides) and place it nearby to see if your kitten prefers another box. Or keep the same box and only change the litter type to see if it is the box or the litter that is the issue.

3. Scoop more often and replace all litter more often.

4. Consider using pheromone diffusers near the litter box to relieve stress and make your kitten more comfortable with their surroundings. These diffusers, when placed in the room with the litter box, make kittens feel that they have marked their territory.

5. Bring your kitten to your veterinarian to check for parasites, urinary tract infections, or other medical issues that may promote inappropriate elimination. These are rare with kittens, but they should not be overlooked.

Your veterinarian can always help you troubleshoot your kitten's litter box issues as well. Above all, remember to be patient! Training takes time, but your kitten will master these habits with your love, support, and attention.

"Litter Training Kittens 101: When to Start and How to Do It." [www.Petmd.Com](http://www.petmd.com), www.petmd.com/cat/training/evr_ct_how-to-litter-train-a-cat.