

Litter Box Care and Maintenance

Urinating and defecating outside of the litter box, also known “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 parents not maintaining the litter box in the same way they flush their owner toilets. Due to cats’ instinctive behavior desire to be clean, it’s understandable that a little box not up to their preference would be unattractive to them.

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

Dirty litter box(es)	Poor choice of litter
Poor location of litter box(es)	Box size too small
Too few boxes	Blocked from the box by a dominant feline housemate
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	

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

- Scoop the litter box twice daily – at a minimum (2-3 item rule)
 - o 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 schedule does not allow this then you should add more litter boxes.

- Use clumping litter – for cats 8 weeks of age and older
 - o 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 get the **scooper under** the waste so that it does not stick to the bottom of the litter box.
 - o Clumping litter comes in several forms such as clay, corn, wheat, and pine. There are pros and cons to all of them, but cat’s first choice is basic clumping clay litter. It is closest to sand, which is most preferred by cats.
 - o Examples of recommended clumping litters (No particular order):
 - [Dr. Elsey’s Ultra Unscented Clumping Clay Litter](#)
 - [Premium Choice Carefree Unscented Clumping Clay Litter](#)
 - The loose littler in the bin at Petco. For the Petco brand, you need to purchase and original container for the product and then return with that empty container for (cheaper) refills.

- Keep the litter deep enough
 - o Litter should be 3.5 – 4 inches deep. Using strong 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 3 to 60 days.

- Use large litter boxes (See last page for examples)
 - o Many commercial litter boxes are too small and lead to cats having to step in their owner 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 they will be willing to use it. Large plastic storage containers can be converted into appropriately sized boxes.

- Have enough litter boxes available
 - o 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 few litter boxes.

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- Some cats prefer to urinate in one box and defecate in another. However, they don't usually exclusively use box for urination and one for defecation, they switch off
 - o 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 problem
- Have litter boxes placed in a quiet area
 - o 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.
 - o It is best to not place litter boxes near cat's eating area
- Replace cat boxes every 6 months to a year. The plastic degrades and cats don't like the smell.

VER 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 of the box, this is a MEDICAL EMERGENCY! A cat with a blockage of the urinary tract can rupture the bladder within 24 hours results in death. You may also notice a blacker cat or one with cystitis licking the genital area frequently.

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

- Do not use litter that does not clump – Except for kitten younger than 7 – 8 weeks of age following a surgery directed by your veterinarian
- Do not use scented litters or deodorizers
 - o Always use unscented litter and do not add any deodorizers to the litter or around the litter box. Scented litters are often a put off to cats because of their extremely keen sense of smell
 - o 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 clean it!
 - o Do not use hooded litter boxes if your intent is to prevent odors from reaching your nose
 - o 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.
 - o Do not use plastic grass mats
 - o Do not punish your cat for not using the litter box
 - o 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 practices. Not all of the issues that cause to stop using the litter box are within our control, but there are many steps you can make take to make their litter box clean and appealing.

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Thinking outside the (cat) box!

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

120qt/30gal. storage bin (See photo below)

Dimensions : 34 L x 20 W x 15 H

Search : [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) for more information

72qt/18gal. storage bin (If space is an issue)

Dimensions: 14.24 H x 16.81 W x 24.04 D

Search : [HomeDepot](https://www.homedepot.com) for more information



Tools to use to cut the box:

Box Cutter (Recommended)

Small 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 inches 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