

## Litter Training for Kittens



In order to avoid litter box problems in adult cats, it is extremely important that you get your kitten off to a good start. Fortunately, most kittens are attracted to an area where they can scratch, dig, and perhaps bury their urine and stool, so that dirt, clay, or any other substrate that allows for digging will usually be effective.

Of course, if there are other appealing areas, such as plants with soil or a fireplace hearth, your kitten may be tempted to choose those areas instead. By choosing a suitable litter, placing it in an appropriate location for the kitten, keeping it clean and dry, and encouraging its use, most kittens can easily be housetrained. If you have more than one cat, add at least one litter box for each new cat to ensure that there are enough clean litter boxes available at any one time, and to reduce the possibility of confrontation or conflicts at the litter box.

To get your kitten off to a good start, it is a good idea to keep the pet within eyesight at all times or to confine it to a room with its litter when you cannot supervise. If your kitten stops playing and begins purposely sniffing around, there is a good chance that it needs to eliminate. Gently pick the kitten up, carry it to the litter box, and place it inside. Praise any sniffing or scratching and give it loads of praise or a small food treat for eliminating. Do this for at least the first two weeks until it has established a regular pattern of using the box.

### 1. Litter (substrate)

- Choose an appropriate litter material such as sepi cat.
- If the litter you have chosen is not being used by your kitten maybe try other types. Some kittens may prefer a different texture or type, while scented products may deter others. Traditional clay litter, recycled newspaper litter, a plastic litter pellet (pearls), cedar shavings, or even a little potting soil or sand added to the litter may prove to be more appealing.
- If your pet won't use the litter box, try to determine if there is anything about the litter that is deterring your kitten. For example, you may find that scented litter, the texture of the litter, insufficient cleaning of the litter, or litter box liners are leading to avoidance.

### 2. Litter box

- Choose an appropriate litter box. The box should be big enough that an adult cat can stretch and scratch. Some kittens prefer a litter box with some privacy so that a hooded box may be preferable.
- If the litter box is not being used regularly by your kitten maybe try a larger box. Some kittens may prefer a deeper litter box with more litter while others may prefer lower sides so that they can be more easily accessed.
- If your pet won't use the litter box, check if there is anything about the litter box that is deterring your kitten.

### 3. Location

- You may have a particular location where you prefer to locate the box, but this must also be acceptable for your kitten. The box should be easily accessible to the pet, especially when it wakes from a nap, or after eating or playing.
- If your pet won't use the litter box, try to determine if there is anything about the location that might be deterring the kitten. If the litter box is in an area that might be unpleasant for your kitten (e.g., a dark basement, next to a furnace or air vent, next to a washing machine, or near a toilet or bathtub), it may be necessary to relocate the litter box.

### What to do if your kitten does not use the litter box!

You will need to seek veterinary advice to help design a program to correct the problem. The first step is to determine whether your kitten is house soiling with urine, stools or both, as well as the surfaces and locations that are being used. Medical problems that might cause these signs must then be considered, since painful elimination, more frequent elimination, or loss of control may drive the kitten away from its box. If the pet has no medical problems that are causing the house soiling, a behaviour program needs to be implemented.

Sometimes it can be successful if you remove the odour thoroughly from flooring and carpets with an odour neutraliser, and change the function of the area to one where the kitten plays, eats, or uses a scratching post. Another option is to block access to the area that the kitten is soiling or to make the area unpleasant. If there is more than one cat, additional litter boxes, or preventing the sharing of boxes (e.g., by cat doors or confinement) can be successful.

Often, the best indication of what can be done is determined by finding out where and when the kitten is eliminating. Try to determine what might be deterring the kitten from using its litter (see above) and what the kitten might prefer about the new area. It might be possible to move the litter or change the litter or box to better suit the kitten.