



## How To Make Your House a Great Place for Your Cat

### The Goals

Cats have several natural behaviors and desires that you want to accommodate: hunting, pouncing, scratching, jumping, climbing, exploring, running, bird- and squirrel-watching, and sleeping. And, of course, eating good food, drinking fresh water, and using a clean, well-situated litter box.

On the emotional side, your cat will benefit enormously from your affection and approval, so be liberal with praise and petting. However, be mindful of when your cat needs his private time.

### Safety First

Keep the following things way out of your cat's reach: string, plastic bags, blinds cords, small ingestibles, poisons, antifreeze, gas, oil – the whole garage, in fact. String is very cute when your cat plays with it, but potentially deadly if he swallows it, which happens more than you'd think. Use under your supervision only.

### The Basics

- 🐾 **High-quality food.** A good name-brand doesn't really cost more. A high-quality diet packs more nutrition per serving and should result in better health and lower vet bills for your cat.
- 🐾 **Fresh water.** Available 24/7. Some vets recommend filtered water.
- 🐾 **Clean litter box.** In a private but easily-accessible and pleasant location. At least one per cat.

### Scratching Post

Indispensable. Cats need to scratch – it's a good daily workout and de-stressor. Start with one good, sturdy sisal-covered post that's tall enough for a full stretch. Before you buy, put some weight on the post like your cat would; if it wobbles (many will), don't buy it. Sisal's a pretty good bet because cats will like the resistance. Position the post where your cat likes to scratch, or near his sleeping spots or the perimeter of the house if you're not sure. Scratch the post yourself, put a little catnip on the post, praise kitty if he even looks at the post, and give him some shredded chicken and extra lovin' when he first uses it. If he ignores the post at first, don't despair. Try new locations; give each location a few days, though.

The sturdy vertical post is probably essential for your cat's scratching, but for the price, you can't beat a cardboard scratching post. Buy three, and experiment with locations. Your cat will not feel like marching to the other side of the house to scratch; he'll really appreciate having a variety of scratching surfaces.

### Even Better Than a Scratching Post

A cat tree. Costs more than a scratching post, but think about all you get for the money: multiple scratching posts, a place to climb, a place to perch and sleep, and often, a place to play hide-and-seek. Put the cat tree near a window overlooking the bird feeder, and your cat's in heaven. While you, the proud parent, look on approvingly as your little guy enthusiastically scratches and jumps and plays and relaxes on his cat tree.

**Top-secret bargain hints:** If you are handy with wood, you can build some incredible scratching posts and cat trees for a fraction of what they cost to buy. In a pinch, you can also create decent makeshift trees.

### Toys and Fun Stuff

Set out some (safe) toys in enticing spots for your cat to discover. Catnip mice, wads of paper, and straws work pretty well. An early morning bell-ball hunt is a good alternative to an alarm clock. Keep it interesting by varying the toys and locations. Mr. Kitty will like finding toys that are hiding under the rug or on a ledge.

### The Most Important Ingredient – You!

Play with your cat each day to help keep him in great physical and mental shape. You're the one who makes his toys come alive, so that he can stalk and pounce with gusto. Let him win most of the time, and praise him on his superior hunting skills. Daily playtime is a great way to strengthen your bond with your cat and help him work off stress and/or negative energy. Afterward, the two of you can take a catnap on the couch.

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