

Cultivating Curiosity in Cats: A Guide to Indoor Feline Enrichment

Providing enrichment is a crucial part of being a cat owner. Especially if our animals are indoors, it's up to us to provide them with the opportunities to practice natural behaviors that help keep them healthy and stimulated. Happily, there are many easy and fun ways to keep your feline friends entertained!

Hiding spots

Whether you have a confident cat or a fearful feline, hiding spots are key, especially during transitions like adoption or moving. Peppering your living space with desirable hiding spots is a great way to help unconfident kitties out of their shell! You can get creative here; boxes, tunnels, repurposed IKEA furniture, even throw blankets artfully draped over chairs.



Height

Having tall places to rest on and retreat to is very desirable for most cats! Not only does it offer them a sense of security, but climbing up and down is great exercise. Cat trees, window ledges, bookshelves and other furniture can all offer cats the vertical space that most of them crave. Pro-tip: include this vertical space as terrain when playing with your cat!

Active Play

Active play--where YOU are directing the action--is incredibly important for a healthy, happy cat. The best options for this play are long toys like wands, fishing pole, and cat dancer style toys. Cats are most active at dawn and dusk, so scheduling playtime during those times is ideal. Check out our "Happy Hunters" Handout for more information!

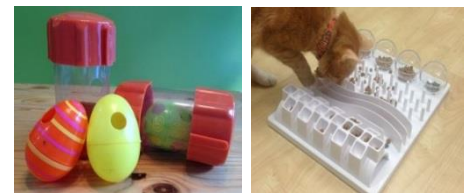
Self-play

In addition to active play, it is *equally* important for cats to have things to bap around themselves when left to their own devices. But all self-play toys are not created equal! Some cats are put off by jingles while others love them. Some prefer plush toys while others like plastic. It's up to US to discover their favorites! Some general all-around winners are plastic springs, rattle mouse toys, ping pong balls and paper balls.



Food Puzzles/Foraging

Cats' bodies are telling them to hunt for their food. This doesn't go away just because they have a bowl! Offering cats the option of foraging for their food is one of our favorite ways to offer enrichment, and can often be used to manage "problem" behaviors! There are TONS of options for treats, wet food, dry food, etc. Does your cat beg at the table? Do they bug you while you work? Do they yowl at night? Food puzzles can be great alternate outlets for all of these behaviors! Check out www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com for a comprehensive overview.



Novelty/rotation

If you take nothing else away from this handout, let it be the understanding that **NOVELTY is key to an enriched cat!** While cats generally like their *environments* and *routines* to remain predictable, their *enrichment* (read: toys, treats, games, activities) should vary! Keep the "active" toys (wands, cat dancers, feather string toys) out of reach when not in use. Rotate the self-play toys every few days to keep things interesting! It's also easy to introduce fun environmental enrichment. A box, a paper bag, or even a blanket over a chair can be enough to keep your friends entertained for hours!

For more information, or to request behavioral assistance, visit our website at www.eastbayspca.org/behaviorhelp

Preferences

Many people profess that their cats “don’t play.” But play is an expression of hunting behavior, and ALL cats hunt. If your cat is not an enthusiastic player, chances are you haven’t found their favorite “toy action combo” yet. Just like people, cats often have very specific tastes, in both treats AND toys. Check out our “Happy Hunters” Handout for an overview!

Catnip

Did you know that about 1/3 of cats have no reaction to catnip at all? Catnip induces an excited or euphoric response and is considered safe for all cats (though kittens don’t often react to it as strongly). However, catnip can cause over excited behavior to increase, such as nipping, grabbing, or biting, so should be used with care in energetic cats.

Water

It’s well known that most cats don’t like getting wet. However you can still use water as novel enrichment! Many cats enjoy drinking from sinks and cat fountains. You can try filling a container with water in the bathtub and floating items like ping pong balls or ice inside it for cats to bat at. This is especially nice on hot days!



Heated beds

Cats have a thermoneutral zone of between 86 and 97 degrees! That means the temperatures that we find most comfortable are usually almost 20 DEGREES TOO COLD for most cats. This usually explains why they are so quick to seek out our laps and laptops as sources of warmth! But heated cat beds can help enormously. They are also great tools if you want your cat to settle somewhere away from you, such as while you are working or at bedtime. Use care to choose bedding designed for pets—many regular heating pads get far too hot and are not designed to be left plugged in.

DIY

Enrichment doesn’t have to break the bank! As anyone who has bought their cat an expensive item knows, sometimes they prefer the box! Anything paper based (boxes, cardboard, newspaper, paper packing material, etc.) is very easy to turn into an enrichment item. Long pieces of packing paper are a shelter favorite. Scrunching up treats in paper, cutting newspaper into fringes, cutting a toilet roll into small circles...the opportunities are endless!



Harness training

Getting to explore areas outside their living space can be a wonderfully enriching outlet--for *some* cats! If your cat confidently explores things like visitors and novel objects, exploring the outdoors might be fun for them. But for some cats, access to unfamiliar areas with unfamiliar sounds, sights, and smells can be overwhelming and scary. Gauge your cat’s readiness, and check out our Harness Training Handout!

Outdoor “Access”: Windows, Catio, Bird Feeders, Etc.

This is a great option for those cats that might be overwhelmed by harness training. Many cats enjoy having a controlled space that connects to the outdoors like a catio if their living space permits. Enabling easy window viewing through window seats and convenient furniture is desirable, and encouraging “cat TV” subjects like birds with an outdoor feeder or bird bath can provide hours of entertainment.

Safety Tips

- For DIY, paper, cardboard, and paper-based tapes only! Plastics and tin foil can be harmful if ingested.
- String only when supervised! Many cats will ingest string, which can cause serious health risks.
- Normal screens can present escape risks! We recommend using pet resistant screens for open windows.
- If your cat is young, be mindful of objects that could fall and injure them.
- Make sure that any house plants are cat safe, or out of reach!