

Cultivating Curiosity in Cats: A Feline Enrichment Guide!

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. This guide focuses on general enrichment; **for an overview of PLAY, see our Happy Hunters handout!**

Enrichment means **anything that allows a cat to practice 'species-typical' behaviors.** Essentially, things that allow them to act like cats!

What are the practical advantages to offering enrichment activities?

- **Providing a constructive alternative to an undesirable activity** (yowling/ankle grabbing/counter surfing)
- **Keeping them occupied during a stressful or exciting time** (visitors/mealtimes/alone time)
- **Assisting in meeting high energy needs** (tiring their brains *tires their bodies out* too!)
- **Offering them a more fun, enjoyable, and enriching daily routine!**



So what do outlets for "species-typical behaviors" look like?

| <i>Species-typical behavior:</i> | <i>Example of enrichment alternative:</i> |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Scavenging for food | Nose work puzzle toys! |
| Dissecting scavenged items | Shred-able cardboard food enrichment! |
| Hunting burrowing animals | Treats in a laundry bin paper ball pit! |
| Mapping their world through scent | Novel outdoor items to smell! |
| Crunching up bones | Turkey tendons or uncooked pasta! |
| Hunting fast birds or mammals | Cat dancer/wand toys! |
| Chasing prey through obstacles | DIY agility activities! |
| Hunting fish/frogs/aquatics: | Floating toys in a bathtub or sink! |
| Chewing on vegetation: | Cat grass/cat mint/catnip/Silver Vine! |

Natural instincts

Cats' bodies don't stop telling them to do these things just because they live with us. Offering them ways to meet those needs in their daily routine is just one way we can help them live happier and more fulfilled lives. **Think about what YOUR cat likes to do;** including the things that get them into "trouble!"

Food Puzzle Enrichment

Let's look at an easy way to introduce species-typical behaviors into your cat's routine—food puzzles! There are many food puzzles that you can purchase for your cat, but many MORE that you can create for them with items you might already have on hand. A good enrichment program doesn't have to break the bank!

Happy Hunters: Foraging Enrichment

Offering your cat a way to "hunt" and forage for their food can be a great outlet, as well as a way to slow down eating speed for "scarf-n-barf"ers.

Examples of foraging enrichment:

- **Lick mats** can be smeared with wet food, meat tubes, and other lickable treats!
- **Wobble toys** require a cat to bap and push an item to get the treats and kibble to come out
- **Hide toys** let you divvy up food or treats into several "caches" for your cat to discover!
- **Puzzle trays** require your cat to use their paws to manipulate the kibble or treats to where they can access them!
- **Snuffle mats** create a surface where cats must root out food or treats

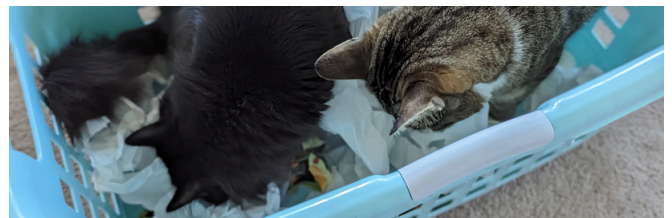


Eco-Enrichment: Recyclables

Paper and cardboard make ideal receptacles for enrichment puzzles because if a cat accidentally ingests a portion, it will not cause a digestive blockage. Most cats will work to eat only the food items offered. However, if your cat is routinely **consuming** the cardboard, we recommend finding an alternative activity.

Examples of recyclable enrichment:

- **Cardboard boxes** with treats inside (no plastic tape)
- **Toilet paper or paper towel rolls** with the sides folded in and treats inside
- **Egg cartons** sprinkled with kibble or treats
- **Paper grocery bags** with goodies inside, open/rolled up/nesting dolled
- **Newspaper or scrap paper balls** filled with treats or crumbs
- **"Ball pits"** of rolled up paper with treats scattered over/inside them, ex. in a laundry basket



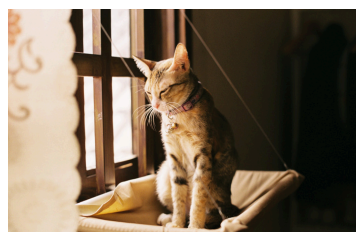
The Environment

The Setup: Offering Options

Cats are natural prowlers, leapers, stalkers, and climbers! And it's important that we offer them ways to express these natural behaviors in our homes.

Examples of environmental enrichment:

- **Hiding spots** are essential, even for confident cats! 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** is also an important option for cats! While some cats seek safety in hiding, others like to get high up to feel secure. Options include:
 - Cat trees
 - Window ledges/shelves
 - Bookshelves/other furniture
- **Outdoor interactions.** There are many ways to offer "outdoor" options without sacrificing safety!
 - Catios/ enclosed porch areas
 - Window boxes/bird feeders for "cat TV"
 - Harness training (see our handout!)



Follow your nose: Feline Nose Work

It doesn't take much effort to set up a nose work course for your cat! **This activity can be a life saver at bedtime, during Zoom calls, and during meals.**

Grab some *dry treats your cat LOVES*, and something flat to lay the treats on like a *plate, washcloth, or piece of paper*. Set up where you can completely *close off access to a room*.

- Get your cat's attention, then step into the closed-off room with them on the outside.
- Place the flat surface on the ground in the middle of the room, and place a treat on top, clearly visible.
- Let your cat into the room! When they locate the treat, toss a second so that they exit the room again and close the door.
- Set up another treat "station" in a different spot, still clearly visible, and let your cat back in. When they find it, toss another treat to help them exit.
- Repeat this process, gradually making the treats harder and harder to find, and adding additional stations. Then start hiding just treats as your cat learns the object of the game.
- **Eventually you will be able to close the door, hide a multitude of treats, and your cat will spend sometimes the better part of an hour excitedly sniffing them out! (bonus points if the lights are off)**



For more information or to request behavior assistance, visit eastbayspca.org/behavior.

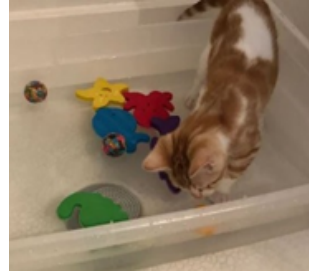
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Encourage exploration!

There are many things that you might not expect your cat to want to explore--but you won't know until you give them the chance!

Examples of "outside the box" enrichment:

- **Water!** Most people don't think cats will want to interact with water. But just because many don't want to get WET doesn't mean they don't find it interesting when it's on their terms!
- **Snuffle mats** create a surface where cats must root out food or treats. A great way to slow eating speed!
- **Heated beds.** Even in the summer time! Cats have a "thermoneutral zone" (desired ambient temp) of 87-97 degrees! Heated beds are often VERY desirable. Make sure to get one that is designed for pets, NOT a regular heating pad!
- **"Legal" plant victims.** If your cat is a plant chewer, why not give them some safe options that are more accessible than the ones you want them to leave alone? Make sure to research thoroughly first!



PRO TIPS!

Your kitty's preference

Cats have preferences just like humans do! A cat who loves a wobbler might be bored by a lick mat, and a cat who loves to dissect might find a wobbler too frustrating.

It's our job to discover what OUR cat loves best, and go from there--and **sometimes this takes a bit of trial and error!**

Start on "easy mode"

While many cats innately show the persistence necessary to "solve" their food puzzles, many more need to gradually increase difficulty. If it's too hard, they may get frustrated and quit.

Consider how you can start a particular puzzle on "easy mode," and/or increase the *value* of the food to encourage persistence!

Variety is the spice of life

Rotating the enrichment you offer is so important! Just like we might get bored doing the same thing every day, our cats can lose interest in the same enrichment every day.

See if you can find several options your cat loves, and **rotate through them to keep them consistently novel!** This goes for toys too.

Safety first

It's essential to make sure that any enrichment you give your cat is safe. When considering an enrichment item, **ask yourself:**

- Is it a choking hazard?
- Could it cause a blockage if swallowed?
- Is MY cat likely to engage in this in an unsafe way? (ex. might eat part of the towel)
- Does this item *need to be supervised to be safe?*