

Resources for Cat Owners

Want to provide an indoor-only life for your cat, but don't know where to begin? We have some vet-approved strategies to help get you started!

Cats, like all animals, need the opportunity to act out their natural behaviors in order to stay happy and healthy. As hard-wired ambush predators, cats need to complete their hunting sequence from beginning to end: Stare, Stalk, Pounce, Grab, Kill. Luckily, there are ways to fulfill your cat's need to hunt without sacrificing wildlife! Give them the tools they need, and they will be able to complete their hunting sequence in the safety of your home.

Windows and Vertical Space

Cats love to perch in high places. They need spaces from which they can survey their territory. Make sure that your cat has access to more than one perch and window. If your cat is climbing on top of furniture you don't want them on, it could mean they don't have adequate places to perch. Oftentimes, getting your cat their own cat tree satisfies them and allows them a designated space all to themselves. Place the cat tree in a high-traffic area of your home or, even better, next to a window—they need something to watch. Cats love watching all of the activities happening on their territory, whether it's birds flying by, squirrels roaming in the yard, trucks making deliveries, or people walking with their families and dogs.

In addition to territory surveying, these spaces also provide cats with a sense of safety. You may notice that your cat chooses to sleep on top of high perches.

Enrichment and Exercise

All animals need exercise and new experiences in order to keep them mentally and physically healthy. Fortunately, because cats are ambush predators, they don't require a large amount of high-intensity exercise. Two to three 5-minute play sessions per day, in which they are allowed to complete the hunting sequence, is enough for most cats.

If you have a higher-energy cat, you may choose to try a cat wheel. Cat wheels are like hamster wheels, or treadmills, but designed specifically for cats! It allows them to run at high speeds as long as they want. Some cats go crazy for wheels, while others are uninterested.

New experiences stimulate your cat's brain and keep them engaged and entertained. Offer them new toys, new treats (always check with your veterinarian first), and new smells. Even something as simple as an item of clothing from outside the home will do the trick. Offer them a friend's jacket and watch them sniff, sniff sniff!

Toys

The best time for your cat to "hunt" some toys is right before meals. Feeding after "hunting" wraps up the hunting sequence, leaving your cat feeling accomplished in their activities.

Every cat has their own personality and interests. You may need to experiment with different toys before finding the right one. Just remember to follow the necessary safety precautions to avoid accidents and injuries.

Be sure to keep your cat's claws trimmed—long, pointy claws can get stuck in fabric. Toys should not be small enough to be accidentally swallowed. Whenever you bring home a new toy for your cat, supervise

them closely. Cats should chew on, lick, bite, and grab their toys, but they should never try to ingest them. If your cat tries to eat anything that's not meant to be eaten, it's a safety hazard and should be removed from the home.

Here are some cat-approved favorites to try:

- "Mice" – Any soft, plush toy small enough for them to carry in their mouths. Cats can chase them, attack them, and may carry them to you, presenting you with their "kill."
- "Kickers" - Larger plush toys, about 1 foot in length. Cats can pull them into their bodies, hug tight, and kick them ferociously with their hind legs—another technique for killing prey.
- Automatic toys – Battery-powered toys which move about on their own. Only turn them on when you are around to supervise. Avoid automatic toys that are a risk for entanglement, entrapment, and injury, especially items with strings, cords, or anything that can wrap around the cat.
- Laser pointer – Use caution, and avoid pointing it directly onto any pets or people for safety. Many cats adore chasing after laser pointers, but it is necessary for them to be able to catch their "prey." Ensure there are other toys around for your cat to physically grab and attack towards the end of a laser-pointer play session, or they will become discouraged, frustrated, and may even develop obsessive behavior—searching for the red dot on the wall long after you've put the laser pointer away. Again, feeding the cat after play sessions also helps signal that they've "caught their prey", and will help prevent obsession.

For more information on the Pets for Plovers Program managed by Maine Audubon and the Coastal Birds Project, please visit petsforplovers.org

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