

**Three Essential Tips for the Best Cat Environment**

Imagine for a moment that you rarely left your house or even went outdoors. You don’t have access to any entertainment including your phone, computer or television. Even though you have the necessities for life such as food, a loving family, a place to sleep and water, you probably still feel like you would like to explore, read a book, move your body or just use your brain for a bit. If you are feeling like the life described above is pretty boring and might lead to a mess of stress-related behaviors such as anger, irritability, depression or hyperattachment to your family, you can understand how your cat feels!

Though loved, most indoor cats live in underenriched environments with little to stimulate their body or their brain. Lack of enrichment contributes to physical and emotional disorders from aggression to urinary tract disease and everything in between.

**What is enrichment?**

Think of enrichment as things available to occupy your cat’s mind and body…things to do. Proper enrichment includes making the environment more complex, new, exciting and engaging for your cat in the way that he or she wants.

Follow our 3 tips below to create a purrfect environment for your cat.

**#1 Find the purrfect cat toys**

One of the biggest missteps that we see cat pet parents make is to assume that they know what their cat likes. This usually results in lots of toys that the cat doesn’t play with and a pet parent who pronounces that their cat “doesn’t like to play.” While it may be true that your cat doesn’t like to play, it is more likely that you haven’t found what your cat likes!

Follow these surefire tips to find the purrfect toys for your cat in 3 months.

* Month 1
  + Purchase 5-7 different types of toys.
  + Consider the sound, smell, type of movement, whether the toy is motion activated, battery powered or controlled by you and feel of the toy to your cat.
  + Make sure to purchase different types of toys.
  + Over the first month watch as your cat plays and note how long he or she plays with each toy, the different characteristics of the toys that your cat prefers and what he or she absolutely dislikes.
* Month 2
  + Purchase 5-7 **new** toys that fit the characteristics that you found that your cat likes in month one. For example, if your cat likes feathers, purchase 5 different types of toys that have feathers, but are different in how they move or how they are powered (human power vs battery powered).
  + Make notes as you did in month 1, which ones are winners and which go in the “give to rescue/shelter” pile.
* Month 3
  + By now, you should have a good idea of your cat’s favs. Purchase 5-7 new toys to finish out your cat’s toy box.
  + Every 2-3 months freshen your cat’s toy box. Always stay with your cat’s preferences.

**#2 Take a look around…what is missing?**

Enrichment isn’t only about toys. Consider all aspects of your environment including resting spaces, scents, sounds and sights. Check out the quick list below to get you started.

1. Resting spaces
   1. Your cat should have one for each cat per room where he or she goes.
2. Hiding spaces
   1. Hiding is a normal feline behavior when a cat needs to feel safe or protected. If your cat likes to hide, provide one space per cat, per room.
3. Scents
   1. Silver Vine and Catnip can be sprinkled on any toy, bed or in a hiding spot.
4. Tactile environment
   1. From soft beds to rough mats to giant pipe cleaner bunting toys, your cat needs variety to stay mentally and physically healthy.
5. Oral environment
   1. Rotating canned food flavors daily (use the same brand of food), cat grass or freeze-dried meats or starches to keep your cat’s taste buds satisfied.
   2. Always introduce new foods slowly.
6. Compound enrichment
   1. These are the big winners, enriching your cat’s life in several ways at once.
   2. Outdoors
      1. Give your cat a taste of the wild by allowing a view or **safe access** to outdoors. There is nothing like being able to smell prey, touch a different surface and lie in the sun.
      2. You might have a catio (cat patio) which is screened in or you can choose to train your cat to walk on a leash and harness.
      3. Your cat should always be in a cat-safe enclosure or on a cat escape-proof harness and leash held by a responsible adult when outside.
   3. Trick training
      1. Cats are smart and love training when presented in short spurts with reinforcement. Check out the resources at the bottom of the page for help with training and enrichment.
7. Litterbox environment
   1. This is a big one! Your cat’s litterbox may be the one thing that he interacts with the most each day. Click [here](https://flvetbehavior.com/is-your-cat-urinating-on-your-bed/) for insight into how you can set him up for success.

**#3 Structure enrichment around your cat’s schedule**

The chart below demonstrates how the average cat spends their time if given the opportunity to do whatever they choose. An average outdoor cat spends 3.5 hours per day hunting. Your cat luckily doesn’t need to hunt for his food. For your cat, those 3.5 hours translate to play-time. That is a lot of play! While each cat is different, structuring your cat’s daily activities around the schedule below will get you and your cat off on the right paw.

**Resources**

* [www.flvetbehavior.com](http://www.flvetbehavior.com)
* [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com)
* Decoding your Cat, American College of Veterinary Behaviorists
* The Trainable Cat, John Bradshaw and Sarah Ellis

With proper attention to the environment, indoor pet cats can live as enriched a life as an outdoor cat while enjoying the health benefits and longevity only available to an indoor cat.