



Fresh Start Adopter Handout

The Litter Box Survival Guide

Preventing Inappropriate Elimination in Newly Adopted Cats

One thing is for sure: it is much easier to prevent litter box problems than it is to fix them. While most cats use their boxes without difficulty, any cat can struggle if certain conditions are not met. The following guidelines can get your new cat off to the right start:

1. **Clean the box.** If one factor contributes to the bulk of litter box problems, it is poor hygiene. You must clean your cat's litter boxes at least once every day—ideally twice. Imagine how you would feel if the one toilet in your home flushed only once a week! Keeping your tools (rake, bags, twist-ties, etc.) handy in a nearby bucket or caddy will enable you to clean your cat's litter boxes in less than 30 seconds.
2. **One box per cat, plus one.** Note that we said "litter boxes." Some cats will urinate in one box and defecate in another...and choose an alternate surface if a second isn't available. If you have a multi-cat household, it is critical that the boxes be spread out around the home, particularly if there is any tension between the cats. Some people say, "I don't have room for another box;" if this is true, they probably don't have room for another cat. Using a larger-size box can help set them up for success.
3. **No switching!** Once you find a litter that your cat likes, stick with it. Don't pick another kind simply because it's on sale this week. Cats are very

sensitive to the feel and scent of their litter and the result of a sudden switch can be urine and feces all over your floor. Buying the preferred litter in bulk can save some of the cost and make sure that plenty is available to you.

4. **No punishment.** If your cat has an accident, don't react: no yelling, no scolding, no spanking, and be sure not to pick the cat up and set him in the box. These things will likely teach him to associate toileting with feeling scared, making him more likely to toilet in secret. Instead of punishing, focus on what might be causing your cat to reject the box.

5. **Get help right away.** If your cat is soiling outside of the box, call the Behavior Helpline immediately at 763-489-2202. Don't wait weeks, months or longer in hopes that the behavior will go away: it might simply get worse.