

## Enriching Your Home

You usually organize your home to meet the needs of you and your family. But what about your cat's needs? By thinking strategically about including certain items in your home (and their placement) you can increase your cat's quality of life, and reduce the likelihood of many common behaviour problems!

### Environmental Enrichment

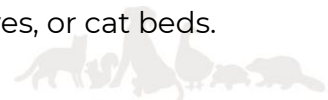
The term environmental enrichment refers to any modification to an animal's environment geared towards meeting its physical and psychological needs. It often involves encouraging normal species-typical behaviour, including physical activity and mental engagement. This reduces stress (and therefore promotes overall health) by increasing an animal's perception of control over their environment and by occupying their time.



### Environmental Enrichment for Cats

There are many ways you can enrich your home with your cat in mind. Below is a list of the top ten "must haves" in any considerate cat owner's home. Luckily, many cat-centric items can satisfy more than one category!

- 1. Vertical space.** Cats are built to climb and jump, providing for this option can help them engage in this behaviour and expend extra energy. Additionally, when cats encounter a new person or object, many feel more secure if they have an opportunity to retreat to an elevated vantage point so that they can survey their environment for threats. Providing for this opportunity can help increase a cat's confidence by making them feel they have more control.
  - **How to provide this in your home:** Cat trees, shelves, or accessible spots on top of items of furniture.
- 2. Hiding opportunities.** Literature shows that providing cats with hiding opportunities can significantly reduce their stress<sup>1-4</sup>. This is likely because it helps them cope with stress by concealing themselves from whatever they find threatening. Then again, many confident cats simply use them as forts. While it is very important to provide hiding opportunities in your home, it can also be helpful to remove access to hiding opportunities that allow cats to totally isolate themselves (such as under beds), as these can make it difficult for fearful cats to learn that you're not such a threat after all.
  - **How to provide this in your home:** Cat trees, cardboard boxes, or cat pods.
- 3. Resting spots.** Everyone likes a comfy spot that is all their own, and cats are no exception. These spots should be comfortable, be allowed to retain their scent (avoid excessive cleaning), and plentiful.
  - **How to provide this in your home:** Cat trees, towels on shelves, or cat beds.



4. **Scratching posts.** Cats are biologically motivated to scratch (even declawed cats do it!). Scratching helps them to communicate a message, both visually and through the pheromones they deposit. Owners need to provide an opportunity to engage in this behaviour.
- **How to provide this in your home:** Provide multiple scratching posts in places your cat would feel is a great place to advertise their message (a high traffic area). Experiment with vertical or horizontal scratchers, and with different materials to find your cat's unique preferences. Make a scratching post even more appealing by rubbing it with Feliway™<sup>5</sup> or catnip.
5. **Social interaction.** Many people think of cats as solitary animals, but cats can find great enjoyment from interaction with humans, other cats, and even other species! These relationships have shown benefits to the health of both parties. BUT these relationships are greatly influenced by previous experience, and the method of introduction.
- **How to provide this in your home:** Expose kittens early to other cats or other species in a positive way. Introduce new pets to resident pets gradually and with lots of treats. See *Introducing Your New Cat to Your Resident Cat* for more information. Make sure you set aside some time to pet, train, or play with your cat daily.

6. **Puzzle feeders.** In the wild, cats spend an enormous amount of their waking hours engaged in hunting and eating. Most owners feed their cat from a bowl once or twice a day. This leaves a large amount of their day free to get into trouble. Puzzle feeders solve this problem because they increase the time required to eat, help break food intake into smaller meals, and are both mentally and physically demanding.
- **How to provide this in your home:** There are many other options (including DIY) available online. We recommend the Catit Senses Digger 2.0 for dry food and ice cube trays for wet food.



7. **Toys.** Play allows for mental and physical exercise. This provides stimulation for a bored cat, redirects the energy of a troublemaker, builds confidence in a fearful cat, and will strengthen the bond between you and your pet.
- **How to provide this in your home:** Provide a range of toys for your cat to play with when you are not around (rotating the toys available to your cat is key to keeping them interested<sup>6</sup>) and toys for interactive play (we recommend Da Bird and Cat Dancer).



8. **Training.** Contrary to popular opinion, cats CAN be trained. Training can help reduce many unwanted behaviours, strengthen the bond between you and your pet, and reduce fear. Plus, the tricks are fun to show off to your friends!

- **How to provide this in your home:**

Desensitization and counter-conditioning can help reduce your cat's fear of things through gradual introduction paired with food, while operant conditioning can help with many other behaviour issues (we recommend starting with target training – check out videos by YouTube user MAUEYES).



9. **Sensory stimuli.** Cats see, smell, and hear the world differently than humans. It is important to keep these differences in mind when selecting items to enrich your cat's world.

- **How to provide this in your home:** YouTube videos of birds, resting places near windows, [David Teie's Music for Cats](#) (research shows it can reduce stress<sup>7-8</sup>), catnip, silvervine (similar to catnip, but affects more cats<sup>9</sup>) or Feliway™ (a synthetic facial pheromone that may help to reduce stress<sup>10</sup>).

10. **Routine.** Cats thrive on a regular routine. If cats know when they can expect certain activities, they may feel more secure in their environment (research has shown that a regular routine can result in a reduction of stress<sup>11</sup>) and be less likely to bug you for them at other times.

- **How to provide this in your home:** Feed/play with your cat on a regular schedule.

## Behaviour problems

Providing enrichment is not only good for your cat, but it can also make life easier for you, too! Many common behaviour problems can be reduced or eliminated by providing appropriate environmental enrichment.

- **Troublemakers**

- *Indicator.* Your cat is outgoing, inquisitive, and active.
- *Strategy.* Provide climbing/perching opportunities, toys, human interaction, feeding puzzles, and training.

- **Fearful cats**

- *Indicator.* Your cat spends a lot of time hiding and startles easily.
- *Strategy.* Provide lots of hiding and perching opportunities and establish a regular routine. Introduce your cat to new people and items gradually and with lots of treats. If your cat is scared of you, engage them from afar by using long distance toys, such as wand toys.

- **Cats sensitive to touch**

- *Indicator.* Your cat enjoys being near you but swats/bites when you attempt to touch them OR enjoys petting but swats/bites after continued petting.
- *Strategy.* Use a puzzle feeder, engage in play that keeps cats away from your hands (such as wand toys), gradually extend the amount of petting they enjoy paired with treats, and train your cat to do tricks as an alternative to petting.



- **Fat cats**

- *Indicator.* Your cat is overweight.
- *Strategy.* Use a puzzle feeder, play with your cat to keep them active, and train your cat to do tricks that require exercise.

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