



Toys For Cats

Most cats love toys, and have their favorites. Toys and playing with your cat not only provide fun activities, they are necessary for good health. **Providing a stimulating environment reduces stress**, especially for indoor cats. Stressed cats get sick. Playtime is part of “enrichment” a critical part of your cat’s good health.

Cats are born predators. However, except for the occasional bug, they don’t get to hunt many things in your house. The good news is cats are easily fooled! They think that catnip mouse is real and that pile of feathers you are waving through the air is a bird. They pounce and stalk as easily as they would real prey.

Active play engages their mind and tones their muscles. It helps to keep them in good shape and their weight down. It also uses up energy so they may stay out of trouble (no guarantee on that part, though!)

It’s important that every cat have interactive play each day. Your cat gets its best workout when you make “prey” come to life! This is also a great time to bond with your cat.



Types of toys

There are several different types of toys. Have a variety for your cat. This will provide greater stimulation.

They need ones to carry around, chase, wrestle with, and swat in the air. They also need things to climb on and hide in. Rotate the toys once a week. Have only a few of them out so they are getting “new” toys all the time.

Prey toys

Most cats love toys that mimic prey like the fuzzy mice and toys with feathers. You can go high tech and buy bugs that move. Some cats think the toys are even better with catnip inside.



Balls

Have some small balls and items to toss in the air, swat, and chase. These should be very lightweight. Some cats like the glittery pom poms, others like a smooth or fabric ball.

Some like the ones that make crinkly noises or have balls inside. Your cat might like balls made out of foil. Ping-pong balls are too big to carry but some cats like to bat them around.

Interactive toys

Interactive toys are ones that you move for your cat. These include wand-type and laser pointers. The good part is that you are actively engaged with your cat.

Some cats like to leap into the air after “birds” and others like to chase “mice”. If your cat has a preference, make the toy act like the type of prey your cat likes.

Two good wand-types are the *Feline Fisher* and *Da Bird*. The *Feline Fisher* has a scrap of denim at the end of the string. You move it around to mimic mice, birds, or bugs.



The *Da Bird* is a set of feathers on a swivel that attaches to a string and twirls as you move the wand. You can buy replacement feathers for it, which you'll need if your cat is good at “catching” the bird.

You might be able to make something on your own, especially something similar to the *Feline Fisher*. Make the string long enough so you can make good strokes with it.

When you are not using these toys, put them away in a closet or they will be destroyed.

Many cats love to chase the bright light from a laser pointer. Never point the light at their eyes or anyone else's. Many people like this because they can use it from their recliner. You can direct it up a climbing tower so they get a better workout.

Use these toys in an open area where your cat won't fall on anything if he leaps. Ideally, the playtime is as long as he wants it to last. When you are finished, give him a toy to grab so he ends up with his “prey”.

Kicking toys

Cats often do a “bunny kick”. They grab an object (hopefully not your arm) and kick it with their back feet. Kong® makes the *Kickaroo* in several styles and sizes.

They are generally a rectangular shape with a “tail” and the cat can hold it and kick at it. Some of them also make crinkly noises. Other larger toys will work as well.

Climbing towers

You probably don't think of this as a “toy” but climbing towers and raised areas provide stimulation and play areas for your cat.

In the feline world, they like it the taller the better. Another option is to put shelves on your wall in an alternating pattern that they can climb.



Food toys

You can put kibble or treats inside these toys. They have small openings and your cat has to move it around or figure out how to get the treats. You can use this to put your cat's meals into if your cat is battling the bulge.



Enclosed toys

You can buy caves, cubes, and tunnels for your cat to hide in and run through. They come with Velcro so you can connect several together. These might be more popular if you have several cats that chase each other. You can make your own from cardboard boxes that you fasten together and cut out doors and windows.



Doc is in a cube while Clipper is next to a Kickaroo

Hiding places

Cats also like hiding place. Beds with tall sides might work, as will an out of the way spot made into a cave.



Everyone knows an empty cardboard box or paper bag is a cat magnet. Remove any handles off bags and don't

allow them to play with plastic bags.

Catnip

Many toys come with catnip added and many cats love it! Some cats get very relaxed with catnip, but a few will become overly stimulated and aggressive. If that's your cat, you'd best avoid the catnip. However, for most cats it's a pleasant diversion.

Catnip loses its potency over time. Some toys come with a Velcro tummy that holds catnip. You can replace the catnip in these and keep it fresh.

Catnip is safe for cats and it is safe to eat. In fact, humans will drink catnip tea for its natural calming effects. However, you might have to fight your cat for the cup!

Catnip is easy to grow outdoors (it won't last if you try it inside). It is in the mint family and spreads excessively. You will want to contain it. You may also be putting out the welcome mat for any cats in the neighborhood. If your cats love catnip, though, they will love you for it!

Precautions

There are things you need to keep away from your cat to avoid injury. **Any kind of string, thread, yarn, or ribbon can be deadly.** Cats often love rubber bands and paper clips, but these can all cause problems if swallowed. Any toys small enough to be swallowed should be avoided.

Many cats love to do "gravity checks". They move things around on counters until they fall off, and then watch them fall. This is dangerous when the item is breakable.



Buy toys that are made for cats. Regularly check them to make sure your cat has not chewed holes in them or removed parts (mice often come up with missing tails). If stuffing is coming out, it's time to throw that toy out.

Summary

Toys are important for our cats to prevent boredom and to reduce stress. Find the types your cat likes best and provide a wide variety. Include some daily interactive playtime with your cat. All of this will keep your kitty happy and healthy!