

Kitty Litter and Boxes

Our topics for this week are:

- **Types of Kitty Litter**
- **Considerations for Litter Boxes**

Although cats have been human companions for 8,000 years, they were rarely kept in houses. Their average life expectancy was less than 6 years. Specially prized cats were kept mostly indoors and provided boxes with sand to urinate and defecate in. Cat boxes allowed cats to stay indoors and staying indoors saved cat lives. Their life expectancy was more than twice as long as cats living exclusively outdoors.

In 1947, the first commercial cat litter made of clay came on the market. Since then, cats have become truly “house”cats. The American Veterinary Medical Association recommends that pet cats be kept in the house all the time to prevent acquiring and transmitting diseases, to protect cats from injuries, and to protect songbirds from cats.

We’ll talk about litter types and choices of litter boxes. Regardless of the litter or box used, litter should be cleaned at least once per day for odor AND disease control.

Types of Litter

The most common material used for kitty litter today is clay. Clay litter may be non-clumping or clumping. Most are 99% dust free and low tracking. Recycled paper and other biodegradable forms of litter or silica-gel variants are less popular.

Some kitty litter also contains baking soda to absorb odors. Odors can be offensive to cats as well as humans and lead to cats avoiding the use of a litterbox smelling of perfumes, urine, or feces. The use of unscented litter, the addition of baking soda, and placing the litterbox in an area with good ventilation is preferable.

Non-Clumping Litter

Clay absorbs some moisture and swells but does not clump. Cats like it for litter. It is absorbent, but selective cleaning the urine from it is difficult to impossible.

Clumping Litter

Calcium bentonite clay clumps when moist. Because of this, eliminated urine can be selectively cleaned from the box, leaving the unsoiled litter.. It should not be flushed since it will clog plumbing..

Biodegradable Litter

Clay is a natural substance that is part of the earth but not biodegradable. Newspaper, pine pellets, sawdust, and others are often more dusty and do not have the same textures as sand or clay. As a result, a lot of biodegradable litters may not be accepted by cats. Biodegradable litters can usually be tracked, that is, dragged out of the box on the cat's paws. Soiled biodegradable litter should never put on gardens due to the risk of parasite transmission such as toxoplasmosis to humans.!

Silica Gel Litter

Silica gel is not silica dust. It is highly absorbent and eliminates odors. One component of clay can be silica. Silica dust particles are 100 times smaller than grains of sand, and inhaling sufficient quantities of silica dust can cause a potentially deadly lung disease called silicosis. Concern about breathing silica dust or any dust is valid. However, the risk of silicosis from kitty litter is overblown on the internet. Only about 40,000 cases are reported of silicosis in humans in the WORLD each year. Most are in people who work with pulverized rock such as stone cutters, hydraulic drill workers, and sand blasters. I have found no reputable reports of any cases related to using kitty litter. I am also unaware of any scientific studies linking the use of kitty litter to silicosis in cats.

Litter Boxes

The selection of litter boxes is as important as selection of litter material. Litter boxes should be as large as you can find and tolerate in the house. Some cats avoid cramped boxes. There should be a litter box for each cat on each floor of the house. After 2 to 3 months of use to determine the cats' preferences, the number of litter boxes may be reduced. The boxes should be placed in low-traffic area with good ventilation. Each litter box should have about 2 inches deep of kitty litter.

Types of Litter Boxes

Open - These encourage frequent cleaning.

Hooded - Hoods help contain litter and urine.

Top-Entry - Having only a top entrance may help keep dogs out.

Self-Cleaning - Self-cleaning boxes use a light or pressure trigger to activate a box comb to rake out clumped urine and feces. The risk of mechanical malfunction exists and combs quickly become dirty and are difficult to clean.

What works best for Todd and me is low dust, unscented, clumping clay litter, a hooded litter box, and a kitty litter sifting scoop, plus some diligence and willingness to work to keep Todd healthy and safe..

If you're interested in particular subjects contact us at **CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com**

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. The best kitty litter is the one your cat will use and you will clean at least daily.**
- 2. Kitty litter should not be flushed or used on gardens.**

More information on animal handling is available in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press. It is also available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources.

Additional information is available at: **www.betteranimalhandling.com**

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.