



Enrichment:

Make staying at home fun for your cat

Your home is the safest place for your cat. By not letting your cat roam freely you are keeping them safe from car accidents, dog attacks and injuries from cat fights, as well as keeping native wildlife safe and the neighbours happy.

All cats need mental and physical stimulation to satisfy their natural instincts and promote their physical and emotional wellbeing. This is especially important for indoor cats.

Cats can live happily indoors as long as they are entertained, but boredom and lack of physical activity can create problems such as obesity, anxiety, aggression and urinary tract infections. Providing an exciting environment with a variety of things to do and places to explore can help prevent many of these problems. Creating a stimulating living space to improve your cat's wellbeing is known as enrichment.

There are three types of enrichment:

Environmental enrichment

To allow your cat to express natural behaviours at home, it is important to provide basic resources such as feeding, drinking, toileting, scratching, playing and resting areas, all in separate locations. Note that the more cats you have, the more resources you will need.

Be sure to provide lots of resting places with plenty of variation in height, location and privacy. Cats like to perch up high as it allows them to survey their surroundings without being disturbed, but they also like enclosed spaces where they can hide away, feel safe and have a quiet sleep.

Consider all your cat's senses when you are trying to enrich their environment. A resting place with a view out of the window will provide visual stimulation, while introducing catnip or other cat-friendly plants to the house will stimulate their sense of smell.

Social enrichment

As much as we like to believe that cats are highly independent, they are also very social animals. One of the most important enrichments in your cat's life is interacting with you, their owner, at a level they are comfortable with. This may be time spent playing, sitting, and sleeping with your cat to create a special bond and help fulfil their emotional needs (and yours). If you have more than one cat, each cat's individual needs will need to be met. One cat may love lap-time and cuddles, while another may prefer being brushed.

Mental enrichment

Cats are very intelligent animals and it is important to prevent boredom and any unwanted behaviours this might lead to. Training your cat to do tricks like sitting or coming on command can be an excellent opportunity to keep their mind active.

Some cats can be very food-oriented. Providing them with puzzles that require them to use problem-solving skills to get to their food can be highly motivating. Just make sure you keep an eye on their total daily food intake and reduce their meal size if necessary.

Playtime with wand toys, balls and other toys will encourage your cat to use their natural instincts to jump, stalk, run and pounce, keeping both body and mind active. Be sure to complete the hunting sequence by throwing a treat at the end and keep high-energy play sessions short so as not to over-stimulate your cat. Keep changing the toys every few days to add variety and prevent boredom.



Easy DIY cat toys

Providing enriching experiences for your cat doesn't have to cost a lot of time, effort or money. There are many simple and easy ways to stimulate your cat's body and mind, from toys to food games and DIY projects with items you probably already have in your home. Ribbons, feathers, bottle caps, toilet rolls, cardboard boxes and crumpled up paper are firm favourites with cats.

Here are six low-cost, simple DIY toys you can whip up in a few minutes.

Reaching puzzle feeder:

Fill a box with a selection of containers and toilet rolls of different heights and widths and glue it all together. Place a few pieces of kibble into some of the containers and present the puzzle to your cat. Your cat will be able to see and smell the food, but it will take some agility to get it out.

If your cat keeps knocking over the box, you can add a string and tie the box to a piece of furniture. You can adjust the level of difficulty of the puzzle to the experience level of your cat. Start them off on low and/or wide containers, such as egg cartons or yogurt tubs, and slowly progress to narrow and tall containers such as toilet rolls. You don't want to make the puzzle too difficult at the start as this will only frustrate your cat.



Slow release puzzle feeder:

Grab a toilet roll and cut a small hole in the middle of the tube. The hole needs to be just large enough to release a piece of dry cat food, but not too big that it all falls out at once. Close off one end by folding the edges inwards, put the food in the toilet roll and close off the other end. The kibble should fall out slowly while your cat bats the toy around.



Sock rattle:

Use a sock to cover a toilet roll. Put a collection of buttons or a cat bell in the toilet roll so it will make a rattling noise. Tie a knot in the sock or use wool to tie it off. Your cat will love rolling this around and chasing the noise.



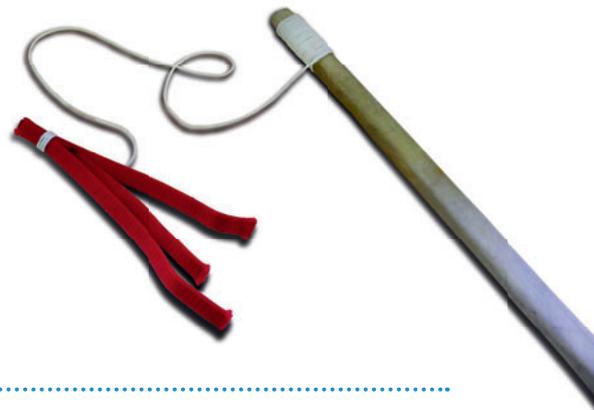
Flared toilet roll:

Grab a toilet roll and a pair of scissors. Carefully make a 1 cm cut into one end of the toilet roll. Continue this all the way around the edge approximately every 1 cm. Turn the cut ends outwards and repeat the process with the other end of the roll. Your cat will enjoy chasing this toy as it rolls around, and the flared edges make it easier to bite and carry around.



Wand toy:

You will need a wooden dowel (minimum 30 cm long), some thick string such as cooking string, a few scraps of fabric such as ribbons or shoelaces, and fabric glue to put it all together. Wrap the string along the top 5 cm of the dowel and use fabric glue to hold it in place. Leave 25-30 cm of string dangling from the dowel and tie the ribbons to the end of the string. You can tie a bell to one of the ribbons for some added excitement. This is an ideal toy to stimulate the hunting instinct of your cat.



Sock body pillow:

Take a sock and stuff it full of cotton wool and a bit of catnip. Tie a knot in the opening. Your cat will love cuddling up with their new body pillow.



DIY cat toy safety note:



Whenever you're making your own puzzles and toys, make sure that they are safe and always supervise their use.

You don't want your cat chewing and swallowing any piece of your DIY toy that's not meant to be eaten!



For more info visit: www.tassiecat.com

