



# CAT LITTER

## The importance of healthy cat litter

When considering an overall health program for a cat, much attention is paid to nutritional choices, and to products that enhance natural behaviors, such as scratching posts, beds, toys and drinking fountains. However, the impact of the litter on the cat, even though a cat has contact with it many times a day, is often overlooked.

The choice of litter can support the health of a cat and the happiness of its owner, or be a source of stress and a cause of illness. And, one of the primary reasons that cats are surrendered to shelters is because they stop using the litter box. Could something as simple as a change of cat litter prevent this?

This brochure is intended to help owners make informed decisions about the litter they provide for their cats, and to understand the importance of litter in a cat's well-being and daily routines.

### Thinking inside the box

Litter made from clay is popular because of its absorption and clumping performance, and because cats readily accept it. But the dust in clay litter may cause eye irritation and respiratory problems for your cat. And, clumping clay litter may cause digestive problems if particles stuck to fur are ingested through grooming.

Plant litter is not associated with illnesses in cats, and naturally occurring enzymes provide great odor control without added fragrances.

Mud Bay carries a variety of clumping and non-clumping litters made from plant-based materials that are healthier for cats (and environmentally friendlier than clay-based litters). We also know that clay litters work best for some cats, so we have carefully selected clay litters made from sodium bentonite clay that is free of harmful silica dust.



Here's a short guide to the general features of plant- and clay-based litter:

#### Plant-based litters are:

- Made from a range of renewable materials (such as pine, paper, wheat, corn, and grasses)
- Provide effective odor control
- Come in a variety of textures including clumping granules and non-clumping pellets
- Biodegradable
- Lighter in weight than comparable volumes of clay

#### Clay-based litters are:

- Very economical
- Easy to scoop, and clumping varieties have strong clumping action
- Dust can irritate respiratory conditions
- Manufactured from non-renewable resources
- Harder to pass if ingested (cats will ingest some of their litter in the course of grooming.)

## Sizing up litter differences

Litters come in a spectrum of textures, ranging from fine granules to large pellets. The particle size of a litter impacts clumping strength, odor control, how comfortable the litter will be for a cat to walk on, tracking and how much litter sticks to fur. Generally:

- **Granules** are usually the easiest to maintain and scoop, however they are the most likely to track and generate excess dust. Granule litters can be softer to the touch and great for cats with sensitive paws, those who are particular about texture, and for switching cats that are used to clay to a plant-based option.
- **Small pellets** have a weak to mild clumping action. This makes them easier-to-scoop than large pellets with less tracking than a granule.
- **Large pellets** are economical, low dust, and low tracking. Because of the large particle size they do not clump. Pellets are a good choice for long-haired cats that get litter granules stuck in their fur, are the best choice for cats post-surgery or post-injury until they have healed.

## A cat is a bundle of preferences

While feline health, human health, and the environment are all important points to consider when selecting a litter, the number one consideration is whether or not a cat will like—and therefore use—the litter in its box. In most cases, a cat can be switched from a clay-based litter to a plant-based one. Still, if the cat prefers a litter that isn't quite as environmentally friendly, the best option for the peace and health of the household may be to keep the cat on that litter.



## Signs that a cat may dislike its litter

Cats don't speak, but if a cat is dissatisfied with her litter, she has ways to make herself understood. A cat may use any of the following behaviors to express her displeasure:

- Meowing when approaching the box
- Perching on the side of the pan
- Shaking her feet a lot when leaving the litter box
- Not digging holes or covering waste
- Occasionally urinating or defecating in other places

Each cat is unique, and any of the above behaviors may be normal for a given cat. Also, a cat may be perfectly happy with her current cat litter, yet display these behaviors merely as a way saying that it's time to clean the litter box.



### If a cat stops using the litter box

If a cat suddenly stops using the litter box and begins to urinate in other areas of the house, it may be cause for concern. Such behaviors may be a sign of Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disorder (FLUTD).

If a cat is experiencing pain when urinating, it may associate that pain with the litter box itself, and so try urinating in other places in an attempt to avoid the pain. If you suspect that your cat has or is developing FLUTD, it's time to consult your veterinarian.

# 1 + 1: Litter box basics

The selection, placement and maintenance of a litter box can be just as important as what fills it for a cat's overall health and well-being.

**The number** of boxes is determined by the number of cats in the household. Feline behaviorists generally recommend the number of boxes be equal to the number of cats plus one, e.g., two cats should have three litter boxes. If aggression between cats begins to manifest around the litter box and elimination, try adding an additional box in a new location. Often, this can defuse the problem.

**Cleanliness** is very important to some cats. Certain cats may demand that their boxes be cleaned every day (in rare cases, even more frequently), while others may be happy to go a week or more between scooping. In general, daily maintenance, even with a clumping litter, is



recommended. Even if the box doesn't seem to need it, daily cleaning can keep cat owners in tune with things like urine volume and stool quality, which are often the first indicators of potential health problems, like Feline Lower Urinary Tract Disorder or kidney failure. And early veterinary care can be the key to helping cats deal with these problems.

**Location** of the litter box is also important. An ideal location is both protected and accessible. When entering and exiting the box, the cat should have every opportunity to avoid ambush from other cats, dogs and children. Try to avoid things that may frighten the cat when they come on automatically, like furnaces.

## How to switch cat litters

**Method I:** Fill a second pan with the new litter and place it next to the established litter box. See if the cat starts using the new litter. If it does, simply remove the old litter and consider the cat switched.

**Method II:** If the cat likes its current litter, choose a new litter that has a texture similar to the one it's using. Mix a bit of the new litter in with the old. Each time the box is cleaned, increase the

proportion of new litter to old until the old litter is completely phased out. Alternatively, layer the old litter on top of the new so the cat will encounter the new litter while digging.

Method II works well for cats who are already using a litter that they like. If the cat dislikes its current litter, try Method I, but choose a litter that has a different texture than the current litter.

## The birth of cat litter

Indoor cats struggled with ashes, sawdust or newspapers until the invention of kitty litter in 1947. In that year, Edward Lowe was working at his father's Michigan building supply company when Kay Draper, a neighbor, asked for help filling her cat's litter box. Lowe suggested baked ground clay, a product his father had manufactured during WWII to soak up oil spills in factories. It



worked. Edward packaged the clay in paper bags, wrote "Kitty Litter" in grease pencil on the outside, and invented an industry. More than six decades later, the fastest growing segment of kitty litter has nothing to do with clay. Increasingly, U.S. litter boxes are being filled with renewable litters made from plant sources like wheatgrass, wheat and corn.

## What's That Smell

The litter box is a cat's restroom so while some smell is unavoidable, with regular litter box cleaning it should not be overwhelming.

If feces smells especially strong it could be a sign that there is a mismatch in the cat's diet and she could benefit from a more digestible food or a digestive aid. If urine smells unusually strong in an otherwise well-maintained box, it could be because it is concentrated. Adding more moisture into the cat's diet can help dilute the urine while keeping her healthier overall.

The peculiarly unpleasant smell of the urine that tomcats use to mark their territory is caused by a sulfur-containing amino acid appropriately named "felinine." It turns out that only members of the cat family have the ability to inflict this noisome organic compound on the world and that a tomcat's impulse to urine-mark is triggered by testosterone.



## Have questions about litter?

Every healthy litter offers a unique mix of performance characteristics, and finding one that fits the bill for both cat owner and cat can take some experimentation. If you still have questions about litter we invite you to stop by one of our stores - we're happy to help find the right solution for your cat.



All locations are open seven days a week.

### We're not vets

Mud Bay's staff are trained in dog and cat physiology and nutrition, but the advice of Mud Bay staff cannot substitute for a visit to a veterinarian. We offer high quality, natural solutions, but we believe that veterinary conditions should be diagnosed and treated by professionals.

Find the nearest neighborhood Mud Bay at [mudbay.com](http://mudbay.com)



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FOR HEALTHY DOGS AND CATS

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