

Cat Toys and How to Use Them



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“Safe” Toys

There are many factors that contribute to the safety or danger of a toy. Many of those factors, however, are completely dependent upon your cat’s size, activity level and personal preference. Another factor to be considered is the environment in which your cat spends her time. Although we can’t guarantee your cat’s enthusiasm or her safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Be Cautious

The things that are usually the most attractive to cats are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Cat-proof your home by checking for: string, ribbon, yarn, rubber bands, plastic milk jug rings, paper clips, pins, needles, and anything else that could be ingested. All of these items are dangerous, no matter how cute your cat may look when she’s playing with them.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren’t “cat-proof” by removing ribbons, feathers, strings, eyes, or other small parts that could be chewed and/or ingested.

Soft toys should be machine washable. Check labels for child safety, as a stuffed toy that’s labeled as safe for children under three years old, doesn’t contain dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Also, rigid toys are not as attractive to cats.

Toy Preferences:

A cat’s toy preferences reflect its prey preferences, which are inherited from the cat’s mother. Cats who chatter at birds will likely be very excited about toys with feathers. Cats who zero in on lizards usually love wand toys with fuzzy worms.

Toys We Recommend

Active Toys:

- Round plastic shower curtain rings are fun as either a single ring to bat around, hide or carry, or when linked together and hung in an enticing spot.
- Plastic rolling balls, with or without bells inside.
- Ping pong balls and practice golf balls with holes to help cats carry them around. Try putting one in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa. You’ll probably want to remove the balls from the bathtub before bedtime, unless you can’t hear the action from your bedroom. Two o’clock in the morning seems to be a prime time for this game.
- Paper bags with any handles removed. Paper bags are good for pouncing, hiding and interactive play. You can also leave other toys inside them for your cat to discover. They’re also a great distraction if you need your cat to pay less attention to what you’re trying to accomplish. Plastic bags are **not** a good idea as many cats like to chew and ingest plastic.
- Sisal rope wrapped toys are often attractive to cats who tend to ignore soft toys.

- Empty cardboard rolls from toilet paper and paper towels are ideal cat toys, especially if you “unwind” a little cardboard to get them started. You can also cut holes in the tubes, put a few treats inside them and pinch the ends closed to make a treat dispenser.
- Boxes are a cat classic for a reason! Any delivery box is a great toy. You can tape larger boxes closed, cut a couple doors and window in them to make a cat play house.

Catnip:

- A cat’s response to catnip is genetic. About 80% of cats over 6 months old react to it. Those who don’t react to catnip may enjoy silvewine, gall fruit or honeysuckle.
- Catnip filled sort toys are fun to kick, carry and rub.
- Plain catnip can be sprinkled on the carpet or on a towel placed on the floor if you want to be able to remove all traces. The catnip oils will stay in the carpet and although they won’t be visible to us, your cat will still be able to smell them.
- Some cats may be overstimulated to the point of aggressive play and others may be slightly sedated.
- Catnip is not addictive and is perfectly safe for cats to roll in, rub, or eat.

Comfort Toys:

- Soft stuffed animals are good for several purposes. For some cats, the stuffed animal should be small enough to carry around. For some cats who want to “kill” the toy, the stuffed animal should be about the same size as the cat. Toys with legs and tail seem to be even more attractive to cats.
- Small fuzzy mice are often a favorite. Some mouse toys are actually made with fur and can be very exciting to some cats.
- Cardboard boxes, especially those a tiny bit too small for your cat to really fit in.

Get The Most Out Of Toys!

- Rotate your cat’s toys weekly by making only four or five toys available at a time. Keep a variety of types accessible. If your cat has a huge favorite, like a soft “baby” that she loves to cuddle with, you should probably leave that one out all the time or risk the wrath of your cat!
- Provide toys that offer a variety of uses – at least one toy to carry, one to “kill”, one to roll and one to “baby”.
- “Hide and Seek” is a fun game for cats to play. “Found” toys are often much more attractive than a toy which is blatantly introduced.

Effectively Using Wand Toys

Wand toy play is essentially hunting practice. You’ll get the best response if you move the toy like prey. Prey doesn’t hang around or move slowly. It darts. It hides. It runs when a predator chases it. And that’s a fast flee as the prey is running for its life. Often periods of darting the toy around the room and then letting it rest in a “hiding” spot will get a full on pounce from the cat. It’s good to remember that as ambush predators, cats do a great deal of watch/stalk and then a burst of run/pounce/leap. That pattern repeats over and over during play.