

Enrichment for cats means that we set up their environment in a manner that allows for them to display natural behaviours. These are behaviours such as for hunting, climbing, playing, scratching and much more. Cats living in environments that lack enrichment are more prone to stress and anxiety and this can lead to a plethora of behaviour and medical problems.

CURIOUS ABOUT CATS?



Let's talk about all your cat's amazing senses and abilities! Cats can spend almost half their day looking for food and hunting. These activities include behaviours like stalking, running, jumping, climbing and catching (very reinforcing). To be successful hunters, this means that your cat's vision and hearing is incredible! They are farsighted and have good night vision when compared with people. Their ears move independently of one another which helps to take in many sounds. Because cats are both prey and predator, their sense of hearing can also help them detect anything new or potentially threatening in the environment.

Cats have a great sense of smell, far better than us humans. This is why incorporating olfactory activities into their enrichment is also recommended. Bringing items in from outside such as twigs, dirt, leaves and placing them in a box for them to explore can be fun!

There are many facts about your cat's body that enable them to have incredible speed, stealth and accuracy. Imagine having all that equipment and it never gets used! That's the way it is for many cats. They're brought indoors, but there's nothing to do. Cats weren't meant to be sedentary and eat mountains of food. Cats were born to move!



10 WAYS TO IMPLEMENT ENVIRONMENTAL ENRICHMENT

FOOD-RELATED ENRICHMENT



There are several varieties of food dispensing toys for dry food and treats. When introducing food toys use higher value treats and ensure your cat can access treats easily to prevent frustration.

DIY food-dispensing toy: Hide food in crumpled tissue paper, or by cutting holes in the cardboard insert from paper towel, or it can be as simple as placing dry food in an empty egg carton!

Puzzle Feeders: If you feed wet food, something as simple as a muffin tin or ice cube tray is great enrichment — just put a drop of wet food into each compartment. You can also consider hiding small plates of wet food around the house for your cat to "hunt" for throughout the day.



WATER STATIONS

Water can be used for enrichment as well. Instead of a plain water bowl, consider using a pet water fountain. This is a good option for cats that like running water and are inclined to drink out of the tap.



PLAYTIME - INTERACTIVE

Interactive play involves you holding a fishing pole-type toy so your cat can concentrate on being the hunter. Move the wand toy in a manner similar to how prey would move. Use fast movements away from your cat, include periodic stops and ensure you allow your cat the opportunity to catch the toy.

Playing "goalie" is also a great interactive game to play with your cats. Throw some cooked chicken cubes, kibble or hard treats down a hallway and they will run to catch it or try and block it. This can also be done with toys!

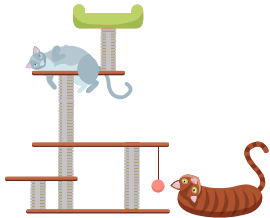


PLAYTIME - SOLO PLAY

These are toys which stimulate the hunting instincts in your cat. Notice, they get bored quickly? Try rotating your cats toys every 2-3 days, so that even older toys appear novel when they re-appear.

Toys such as furry mice, crinkle balls and other small toys. Up the fun factor by placing them in locations that inspire curiosity:

- Place a furry mouse inside an empty tissue box. Cut paw-sized holes in a box, tape the flaps closed and toss some toys in there.
- Place a ping pong ball in a basket or box with some food treats or in a bathtub where they can bounce around and your cat can catch them.



ELEVATED SPACE

Cats often seek out high spots for napping. An elevated location can also become security for a cat, especially in a multi-cat home.

You can create elevated space with cat trees, which come in various heights and configurations. Depending on your budget, you can purchase a simple tree or an elaborate one that reaches the ceiling. What's most important is that it's sturdy so if kitty takes a flying leap the tree won't topple over.

Cat walks and shelves can also add to elevated territory. You can purchase shelves and walkways or you can make your own. You can make it as elaborate or as simple as you'd like.



HIDEAWAYS

Hideaways can be in the form of a covered or uncovered bed. You can even take a box and turn it on its side to make a bed, and line it with a soft towel. For a very timid cat, cut a hole in the box as an entrance, turn the box upside down and your cat will have a complete hideaway. No matter how confident your cat may be, always make sure there are options for hiding in the environment. Every cat needs hiding places.



TUNNELS

A tunnel can be a wonderful addition to environmental enrichment. You can purchase soft fabric tunnels or make your own using paper bags. If using paper bags, fold a one-inch cuff at the top to make the bag sturdy. Cut the bottoms of the paper bags, fold a cuff around that end and then tape bags together



SCRATCHING POSTS

Scratching is a natural behaviour. Supply multiple tall, sturdy posts covered with different substrates. Some cats prefer horizontal scratching posts, while other prefer vertical. Being able to get a good scratch, stretch the muscles and maintain nail health is vital for all cats. Try adding a little cat nip or honeysuckle spray to encourage scratching in the right places.

For more information about Prevention and Management for Destructive Scratching, [click here](#)



VISUAL AND AUDITORY ENRICHMENT

Cat TV-footage of rodents, fish and birds have been shown to peak cat's interest and can help cats that cannot easily access windows. If your cat tries to "hunt" animals on the TV this may not be the best option for them. Calming music, that can be found on iCalmCat or the compilation "Through a Cat's Ear" can decrease anxiety for many cats and even drown out ambient noise in the environment that could be stressful for them.



CLICKER TRAINING AND AGILITY

Clicker training is an effective and fun way to train tricks and foundation behaviours, such as touch and sit! Training sessions for cats should be about 2-5 min in length, short and successful!

Agility is something we associate with dogs, but cats can do it too. You can clicker train kitty to do a fun obstacle course in your home, going through tunnels, jumping over pillows and onto chairs! You can also use a toy wand and have them follow it through the course

Harness training your cat is also a great way to allow your cat to use all their senses to explore outside on-leash and stay safe!

Environmental enrichment is a necessity, not a luxury. It's time to increase the fun factor in your cat's life. Customize whatever you do to fit your cat's age, mobility and health factors. Some cats will obviously be more active than others but every cat can benefit from a more stimulating environment.