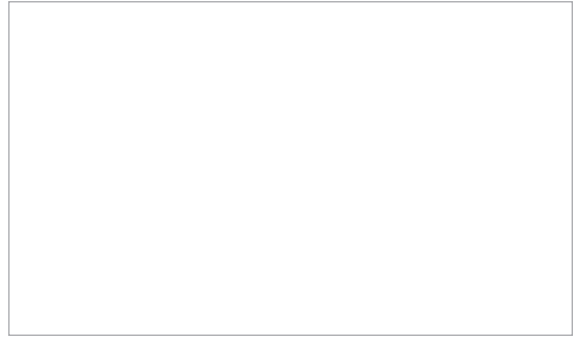


What your cat needs

Irene Rochlitz



What your cat needs

The inside of your home is the heart of your cat's territory, where your cat should feel safe and comfortable. Here is a list of the important things to consider when arranging your house to meet your cat's needs.

Space

- There should be enough space for your cat, at least two rooms.
- More important than the amount of space is its quality. This means making sure your cat can make use of the space, especially the vertical dimension.
- Cats like to climb and spent a lot of time off the floor, on raised surfaces such as shelves placed at different heights, window sills, cat activity centres or even on the tops of wardrobes and cupboards if they can be reached easily.

Food and water

- Your cat should receive a balanced diet that is correct for its lifestage (kitten, adult, senior).
- It is better to feed your cat several small meals during the day, rather than two larger meals.
- If your cat is overweight or easily bored, try stimulating 'hunting' behaviour by hiding pieces of dry food for your cat to discover, or using a puzzle feeder.
- Offer clean water next to the food bowl and also in a place away from the feeding area.

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What your cat needs

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Litter tray (box)

- If your cats are kept indoors, there should be one litter tray per cat, plus one extra one. These should be in multiple locations to allow all cats easy access to them.
- Make sure the trays are kept clean and free of smells, by scooping out soiled litter once or twice a day.
- Clean the trays and replace litter as often as is necessary to keep them clean and odour-free.
- Place the trays in quiet but easily accessible areas; avoid busy areas or very remote locations.
- In multi-level houses, make sure there is a litter tray on each floor.
- Make sure the litter trays are big enough: at least 1.5 times the length of the cat, and that the cat can get in and out easily.
- Most cats prefer uncovered boxes and unscented, clumping fine-grained litter.
- Size of tray, placement and cleaning frequency may be different for kittens and senior cats.

Resting and sleeping areas

- Cats spend a lot of their time resting and sleeping, so there should be plenty of comfortable areas for them throughout the home.
- Some of these areas should be raised off the floor on higher surfaces such as chairs, beds and shelves.

Hiding places

- Being able to hide helps cats cope with challenges, changes and stress in their environment.
- Hiding places can be boxes, crates, baskets, wardrobes or cupboards with the door left open.
- A comfortable hiding place can also serve as a rest or sleep area, especially if it is raised off the floor and is a good look-out (vantage) point.

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What your cat needs

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Claw scratching

- Claw scratching is a normal behaviour that cats do to stretch their muscles, keep their claws in good condition and also to leave scent that marks their territory.
- Good surfaces for scratching include scratch posts, sisal rope, hessian, rush matting, cardboard and pieces of carpet and wood.
- Scratching surfaces should be put at places of entry and exit into the home where new smells are brought in (for example, by the front door or the door to the garden/yard).
- Scratching surfaces should also be placed next to resting or sleeping areas, as cats often stretch and sharpen their claws after waking.
- Prominent surfaces such as corners of furniture are often used, so these can be covered with a suitable material for scratching, or scratch posts placed next to them.
- Cats often like vertical scratching surfaces that are high enough for them to stretch fully and with a vertical thread to pull the claws through, though horizontal scratching surfaces may also be used.

Human contact

- Most cats enjoy having contact with their owner, so owners should spend time every day with their cats, preferably for at least 10 to 15 minutes a session, several times a day.
- Some cats will enjoy being petted and groomed and handled, while others will like to play.
- Try to identify the kind of toy your cat prefers to play with.
- Toys that mimic small prey are often best, if they flutter or squeak when touched, move rapidly or suddenly, or have feathers or are covered in soft fur so much the better.
- Other toys include 'fishing' rods, ping-pong balls, bouncy or self-propelling toys.
- Cats will get bored with playing with the same toys so there should be a variety and they should be replaced frequently.

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What your cat needs

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Activity and exploration

- It is important for cats to be active, as this helps prevent obesity and boredom, especially if your cat is kept indoors all the time.
- Offer your cat things to explore, such as large boxes, large paper bags and other structures.
- Access to the outdoors will provide your cat with a wide range of stimuli and opportunities for exercise but may be associated with certain dangers.
- If your cat is unable to go out freely, consider making a secure pen or other type of enclosure outdoors, or training your cat to go out on a harness and lead.
- Using techniques to stimulate feeding behaviour will also encourage activity.

Stimulation of the senses

- Even if your cat is confined indoors, he/she can enjoy outdoor stimuli (sounds, sights and smells) by using window sills, viewing platforms near windows, or using secure balconies or other enclosures.
- Audiovisual products are available for cats, which contain images and sounds of nature that may be of interest to them.
- Catnip is a well-known stimulant that some cats enjoy.
- Some cats like to chew certain types of grass that can be grown in containers or pots.
- Surfaces that cats have used for scent marking (such as corners of tables and doors that cats have rubbed against) should not be cleaned too often.
- Many cats do not like household sprays containing citrus scents.