



Cat Toys – You Need Them

Play is a vital activity not only for kittens but for adult cats, too.

Cats are athletic creatures with amazing strength and agility. Nature made them into perfect machines for leaping, jumping and dashing. Just because your house kitty doesn't have real prey to chase doesn't mean she can't act out her inner predator.

Why it's important for cats to play

Toys and regular playtime are part of providing your cat with a stimulating environment, which makes for a happy and healthy cat. Play gives them an outlet for their energy, mental and physical stimulation, the opportunity to satisfy their instinctual hunting drive and a chance to bond with you.

What cats like to play with

Cats are experts at amusing themselves. It takes very little—a crumpled ball of paper, a pen left on a desktop or a newspaper spread open on the floor—to engage your cat in what, to her, is the most fascinating of games.

Your cat's imagination can turn almost anything into a wonderful toy that she'll bat around or chase to her heart's content. Typically, cats most enjoy playing with small, light objects that are "flickable," such as a cork or a Ping-Pong ball, which they can swat and then chase.

Cats also love empty paper bags to investigate and "hide" in. Remove the handles so your cat doesn't get caught in them. He could be terrified if he's chased by a big paper bag. Empty cardboard boxes are also popular with cats.

How to play with your cat

Playtime isn't just for cats—it's for their people, too. Your cat's speed and grace will amaze you as she dashes about, trying to catch her "prey."

Toss a crumpled ball of paper for her to chase—she may even bring it back to you. Some cats love to "fetch" so much that they will actually initiate the game by dropping a toy in your lap for you to throw.

Some cats go wild for the little red light of a laser toy, chasing it around the floor and up the wall. The cat gets a good workout, and you don't even have to get off the couch. Just be sure never to shine

the light in your cat's eyes, as it could damage them. When the game ends, offer your cat a toy to finally grab.

How to make do-it-yourself cat toys

You don't need to spend a bundle on fancy toys for your cat. In fact, many owners say that their cats ignore the store-bought toys and play instead with a plastic ring from a milk container, a strip of paper, or a gift bow.

Here are some household items that make great cat toys:

- Round plastic shower curtain rings
- Ping-Pong balls and plastic practice golf balls with holes. Try putting one in a dry bathtub; for many cats, the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa.
- Paper bags with any handles removed. Paper bags are good for pouncing, hiding and interactive play. Plastic bags are not a good idea; many cats like to chew and swallow the plastic.
- Empty cardboard tubes from toilet paper and paper towels, made even more fun if you "unwind" a little cardboard to get them started.
- Cardboard boxes. Fasten some together and cut out doors and windows to make a fun cat condo.
- You (or your kids) may even enjoy making your own toys, such as felt mice stuffed with catnip.

Shopping for cat toys

There's really no need to buy toys, but there are so many cute ones out there that it can be really hard to resist. Cats really enjoy toys such as plastic balls, with or without bells inside, sisal-wrapped toys, which they can dig their claws into, or "fishing pole" toys consisting of a long rod with a length of cord attached that has an enticing lure at the end.

If you're going to buy any cat toys, you might need to cat-proof them, too. Remove ribbons, feathers, strings, tinsel, eyes or other small decorations that your cat could chew off and swallow. Also, keep any toys that could be harmful to your cat out of reach when you can't supervise her play.

A word about catnip

Catnip, a member of the mint family, contains a chemical that attracts cats. When it's dried and crushed, it gives off an odor that has a powerful effect on some (though not all) cats.

Catnip is safe, and your cat won't get addicted to it. Keep a plastic container of dried catnip on hand to give to your kitty, or you could even grow some.

Some cats can get over-stimulated to the point of aggressive play, while others just get relaxed. Genetics determines if and how your cat is affected by catnip. The ones that do react usually develop sensitivity to it when they're about six months old.

Toys that aren't safe for cats

It's important to let your cat only play with toys or other objects that are safe. Cat-proof the house by *hiding* these things:

- String, yarn, ribbon and dental floss
- Paper clips
- Pins and needles
- Rubber bands
- Plastic bags (especially drycleaner bags—she could suffocate)
- Anything else that your cat might chew

How to get the most out of your cat's toys

Like a 3-year-old child, your cat can become bored with his toys. To keep them "fresh," rotate your cat's toys weekly, making only a few available at a time. Keep a variety of types easily accessible. If your cat has a favorite, like a soft "baby" that she loves to cuddle, you might want to leave that one out all the time.

Provide toys that offer a variety of uses—at least one toy to carry, one to wrestle with, 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 that is obviously introduced.

Many of your cat's toys should be interactive. This kind of play is important for your cat, because she needs active "people time"—and such play strengthens the bond between you and your cat.

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About Napa Humane

The Humane Society of Napa County and SPCA, known as Napa Humane, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1973. Recognizing that companion animals are an important part of healthy communities, we've grown to consider Napa Humane a community service organization. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of animals – and also to provide support, education, and assistance for all the people who care for and about them.

Napa Humane is a private and independent organization that is supported by private donations by individuals and businesses, bequests, and fees for service. We receive no government funding, tax dollars or funding from national animal welfare organizations.

Our Mission

To promote the welfare of companion animals through protection, advocacy, education, and by example.