

# Thinking Inside the Box

## How to create the purrfect litterbox setup!

This guide is meant for people who are getting a cat and setting up their litterboxes for the first time, or for people who have minor issues with their cats occasionally going outside of the box. If your cat suddenly starts going outside of the litterbox, the **FIRST** thing you should do is see a veterinarian to make sure your cat is physically healthy. Urinary issues are serious business!



## Do you have enough litterboxes?

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### Minimum:

- Shoot for one more box than the number of cats.
- Try to have a box on each floor where your cat spends time.

## Is your litterbox big enough?

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### Length should be about as long as your cat from nose to the end of their tail

- Make your own from a utility tub (deep sides with a U-shaped door cut into one of the sides, lid off) OR use a shallow under-the-bed storage container with lid removed.
- If the utility tub is taller than your cat, go with a clear option so they can easily see outside the box.

## What about covered and automatic litterboxes?

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### Avoid covered litterboxes

- Cats want to be able to see if anything or anyone is outside the box waiting to pounce.
- Purchase litter mats to help keep litter from tracking.
- Dog and child deterrents: litterbox sitting within a much larger box, “Door Buddy” straps or a baby gate with a small pet door to keep children and larger dogs out of the room, or a small cat door that dogs and children can’t get through (RFID chip or magnetic) in the door of the room.

### Avoid automatic litterboxes

- They’re usually too small and many have covers.
- They limit your ability to see what your cat is or isn’t doing in the box, which is vital for monitoring their health.
- They can startle your cat if they start a cleaning cycle while your cat is nearby.

## Your cat's nose knows!

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### Let's talk litter

- Scoop litter clumps at least once a day.
- Use unscented litter.
- Cats prefer fine-grained clumping litter.
- Replace all litter every 2-4 weeks.
- Cats prefer litter to be 2-3 inches deep, maximum.
- Do not use litterbox liners.

### Wash litterboxes periodically

- Rinse boxes with hot water and let dry, then sprinkle baking soda in bottom of boxes when you replace litter.
- Periodically wash boxes with mild dish soap and hot water (no bleach).
- Replace boxes every 6-12 months.

## Location, Location, Location

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### Provide multiple access routes

- Ensure access to all litterboxes can't be blocked if a pet or child happens to be hanging out in a certain spot (like in front of the hallway or stairs).
- Choose locations where your cat can enter and exit the box from more than one direction. Try to avoid small closets, bathrooms, etc.

### Out in the open or tucked away?

- Beware of potential "ambush" spots when your cat is in the litterbox, like nearby corners or perches.
- Cats feel safest with open sightlines.
- Avoid busy areas with lots of traffic or noise.
- Avoid places completely out of the way (e.g., dark corner of the basement).
- If your litterbox is in a room that gets dark, provide a nightlight.

### Multiple boxes side by side?

- Don't do it. To a cat, that's just one big box with annoying obstacles in the middle. Spread your litterboxes out.

### Place boxes away from food and water stations.

- Cats instinctively don't want to eliminate near a food or water source.

### Place away from machines that may startle (water heaters, washers, etc.)

- It only takes one scary moment near or in the box for your cat to think, “Nope, that’s not safe. I’ll pee in the corner instead.”

❑ **Access should be unencumbered**

- Avoid barriers that make it harder for your cat to access their litterbox, especially if they’re older or dealing with mobility issues.

## Accidents Happen...

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❑ **Clean up**

- Use an appropriate enzyme-based cleaner (e.g., unscented Anti-Icky Poo). Do not use detergents or soaps alongside enzyme cleaners; these will kill beneficial enzymes and you will not be able to get rid of the urine smell.

❑ **Protect your carpet**

- Place a vinyl carpet runner underneath litterboxes.

For more information:

[www.felinebehaviorsolutions.com](http://www.felinebehaviorsolutions.com)

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LeeAnna Buis, CFTBS, is a certified feline training and behavior specialist. She strives to dispel misconceptions about cats and why they do what they do. She teaches you to look at things from the cat’s perspective. “If you’re aware of a cat’s natural needs and instincts, and you view situations through that lens, instantly you’ll better understand why those unwanted behaviors exist — why they’re reacting the way they are. And you’ll be much better armed to address the behaviors with kindness and understanding — in a way that meets your cat’s needs as well as your own.” [leeanna@felinebehaviorsolutions.com](mailto:leeanna@felinebehaviorsolutions.com)



Marci Koski, PhD, is a certified feline training and behavior professional who has successfully helped cats and their people resolve behavior problems such as house-soiling, aggression (with other cats and people), fearfulness, destructive behaviors, and many other issues. The mission of Feline Behavior Solutions is to keep cats in homes and out of shelters as the result of treatable behavioral issues. By providing cat guardians with the necessary education and tools to prevent or treat behavior problems, Dr. Marci helps guardians coexist with their cats in happy, healthy relationships throughout their lives. [marci@felinebehaviorsolutions.com](mailto:marci@felinebehaviorsolutions.com)

