



# Litter Training Your Kitten

## St. Michael Veterinary Clinic

- From a young age, cats have a strong instinct to void in sand or soil. Typically, cats dig to prepare a shallow hole. More digging follows to cover its waste. Cats exhibit a wide range of normal behavior relating to elimination. Some normal cats do not cover waste, while others dig enthusiastically before and after voiding. They often prefer a specific litter box location and type of litter. To encourage kittens to use the litter, gently place the kitten in the pan soon after each meal. If the kitten has had an "accident" outside the box, simply place the mess in the box to help the kitten make the desired association. Punishment is never necessary, as kittens usually learn quickly. Avoid disturbing your cat while it is using the box and never punish if for any reason when it is near the box.

- **The litter Box and Litter Material:**

Many types of litter boxes and litter material are available to cat owners. Litter boxes or pans are generally rectangular plastic containers. The box size should be large enough to comfortably accommodate an adult cat. (You can consider replacing a standard litter pan with any other suitable container.)

Covered litter boxes are available in a variety of styles and may substantially reduce odors. Some litter box covers have charcoal filters that further reduce odor. You can purchase a litter pan without a cover, but ask whether a cover may later be added, just in case.

A standard covered box requires the cat to step into an opening in the cover's front. Other models require the cat to enter and exit through an elevated and inclined opening. The top portion of a covered box can also be removed and placed upside down as an alternative litter pan for cats that tend to void over the edges or are unsteady because of age or illness. Cats are not born with an instinct to eliminate on unnatural litter filler. Their natural choice is sand or soil. A wide variety of litter filler is marketed to attract the cat owner. In choosing a litter filler, consider first and foremost what your cat prefers.

Some cats may have no preference, while others are surprisingly choosy. It is probably best to begin with a product that is basic and simple. The dust or scent of perfumed or deodorizing filler materials may be disturbing to some cats. Others may prefer fine sand-like filler or even shredded newspaper.

If you decide to try a new brand, your cat might adjust more smoothly if the two litters are mixed for a time or can be offered in a separate box to see if one is preferred over the other.

- **Care of Litter Boxes:**

The most important thing to encourage litter box use is cleanliness. Cats are very clean animals; they avoid foul-smelling and damp places. Consider not what you think is clean, but what your cat considers acceptable. Change the litter completely and frequently at regular intervals, using the manufacturer's recommendation as a guideline. Each cat has its own tolerance of litter box contamination and may avoid using the box if it is too dirty. As a rule of thumb, provide one litter pan for every cat in your household. If you have more than one litter box, you may find that some are used more than others. This may reflect your cat's preference for location or dissatisfaction with litter hygiene, suggesting that you should reconsider box placement or change the litter more often. Cats in multi-cat households often

share litter boxes, but some are less tolerant of soiled boxes. Though you may have several boxes in your home, you must keep them clean to ensure their regular use.

➤ **Litter Box Location:**

Cats prefer to eliminate in boxes that are placed in a quiet location, such as a corner away from busy areas. Place the litter pan well away from a food or water bowl. It is also important to never block access to the litter box. Consider placing an additional box. Rule of thumb: Consider having one litterbox per cat in household plus one additional.