

Enriching Your Cat's Life

Free-ranging and feral cats lead complex, busy lives. They maintain large territories that often contain a variety of habitats (forest, farmland, urban gardens). They explore, hunt, scavenge for food, and may interact with other cats. In contrast, household cats, especially if kept indoors only, have little to do and boredom can set in. Other good reasons to spice up your cat's life are:

- Cats who lack enrichment can be aggressive in play, with people and with other animals.
- Young cats often pester their people for play at inappropriate hours of the day and night. They may also be destructive with furniture, plants or other objects in the house.
- Cats lacking enrichment can become reclusive and are more likely to retreat from new people or objects than cats who are frequently exposed to a variety new sights and sounds.
- Cats lacking regular play can be more attracted to window perches. When looking outside, they may overreact to outdoor cats they can see and become distressed.



Enrichment Ideas

- Provide a variety of toys for your cat. Some cats prefer toys that they bat around themselves. Others prefer toys that require your participation, such as those you wiggle and dangle. Stimulating play for a cat means simulating opportunities to "hunt," so move toys in such a way that they mimic the movements of a rodent or bird. Introduce new toys periodically to keep your cat from becoming bored with her toys.
- Provide objects for your cat to explore, such as cardboard boxes, paper shopping bags, packing paper and toys that encourage her to investigate with her paws. A dripping water tap can provide hours of fun! An aquarium with real fish or even fake fish that move can fascinate your cat. Rotate play objects frequently so your cat doesn't become bored.
- Some cats appreciate "cat videos." The most popular ones contain close-ups of birds and small rodents. Many cats can watch the same videotape for hours, tracking the animals' movements, growling or chirruping and swatting at the screen. Your cat might also enjoy watching a lava lamp.
- Position bird and squirrel feeders outside windows where your cat can observe animals coming and going during the day. If you live in an apartment, you can attach bird feeders directly outside your windows.
- Provide several small meals a day rather than one or two large ones. If your schedule doesn't permit that, purchase a feeder with a built-in timer, designed to open on a schedule. Avoid "free feeding" (keeping your cat's bowl full all the time).
- Teach your cat to walk on a leash with a harness. Going on leashed walks is a safe way to take your indoor cat on outdoor adventures. To be safe, make sure your cat always wears ID tags on her collar when walking outside.
- If you have the space, build an enclosed outdoor area where your cat can spend time when the weather is nice. Cats will spend hours watching leaves blow in the wind, birds flying and squirrels scampering around. If you can't have an outdoor enclosure, try creating a window perch where your cat can easily sit and look out the window.