

Enriching Your Cat's Life

Free-ranging and feral cats lead complex and busy lives. They maintain large territories that often contain a variety of habitats (forest, farmland, urban gardens, etc.). They explore, they hunt, they scavenge for food, and they might interact with other cats. In contrast, household cats, especially those who live exclusively indoors, have little to do and boredom may set in.

Even if you don't think that your cat seems bored, there are a number of good reasons to provide enrichment opportunities for your feline friend.

- Cats who lack enrichment can be aggressive in play, both with people and with other animals in the household.
- Young cats without planned enrichment opportunities often pester their pet parents for play at inappropriate hours of the day and night. They may also interact destructively 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 that enter their homes than cats who are frequently exposed to a variety new sights and sounds.
- Cats lacking regular play may be more attracted to perches by windows. When looking outside, they may overreact to the presence of outdoor cats they can see and become very distressed.

GREAT WAYS TO ENRICH YOUR CAT'S LIFE

Enrichment opportunities can easily be provided for cats. Here are some ideas to try:

- Provide a variety of toys for your cat. Some cats prefer toys that they can throw around themselves. Other cats prefer toys that require owner participation, such as those you wiggle and dangle. Stimulating play for a cat involves 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. Please see our article, *Cat Toys*, for fun toy recommendations and tips on playing with your cat.
- Provide objects for your cat to explore, such as cardboard boxes, paper shopping bags, packing paper and toys that encourage her to investigate various holes with her paws. A dripping water tap can provide hours of fun! An aquarium with real fish or even a bowl of fake fish that move around can fascinate your cat. Rotate playtime objects frequently so that your cat doesn't become bored.
- Some cats appreciate the commercially available "cat videos." The most popular ones contain close-ups of birds and small rodents. Many cats can watch the same videotape for hours each day, tracking the animals' movements, growling or chirruping and swatting at the screen. Your cat might even enjoy watching a lava lamp! (Take care that she can't burn herself if she touches the lamp.)
- Cats love to watch birds, squirrels and other small animals. 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 to the outside of your windows.
- Provide several small meals per day rather than one or two large meals. Also avoid "free feeding" (keeping your cat's bowl full all the time). If your schedule doesn't permit giving multiple meals, you can purchase a feeder with a built-in timer, designed to open according to a preset schedule.
- 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.
- Training your cat can give her a great mental workout. Just like dogs, cats can learn a number of useful behaviors and fun tricks, like sit, come when called and shake.

Source:

- ASPCA: <http://www.asPCA.org/Pet-care/virtual-pet-behaviorist/cat-articles>