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Supplies That Every Cat Household Needs

(Most available at the Cat Adoption Team's in-shelter Cat Boutique)

Outfitting a house for a new cat isn't nearly as complicated as it may seem. Just a little advance thought will help make the newcomer feel at home and welcome in strange new surroundings.

Every cat household needs the following:

Litter box and litter. The litter box, or pan, should be shallow enough for the cat to jump into easily, but the sides should be high enough to contain scattered litter as the cat scratches in it. Commercially sold plastic litter boxes are excellent. Some have high-domed lids on them to keep flung litter from spreading throughout the house.

You probably won't have to worry about training your cat to use the litter box, but you will need to show your cat where to find it. Cats are fastidious and have a keen sense of smell. It is important to clean the pan daily.

Never place a litter box close to where the cat is fed, because cats believe these two duties are quite separate, and they will choose to do one or the other elsewhere. Many people put the litter box in the bathroom, away from high-traffic areas.

Cat dishes. Each cat should have his or her own food and water dishes. These must be shallow; cats like to keep their faces and whiskers clean while they eat.

Grooming tools. Although cats groom themselves, they generally love to be brushed and combed. Long-haired cats must be brushed daily to prevent their hair from matting. Even short-haired cats enjoy the attention and the stimulation of being personally attended to. Use a daily brushing ritual to keep an eye on your cat's overall health and on skin and coat conditions. Some rubber brushes have special teeth that dig down and remove loose dander and dead skin cells. Metal, fine-toothed combs are designed to extract fleas from the coat.

Nail clippers. You also can use human-nail clippers. Read our tips for trimming your cat's claws (see link below) and, if you have trouble convincing your companion to cooperate, ask your veterinarian or groomer for additional advice or a demonstration.

A scratching post. Cats can be easily trained to scratch on a scratching post instead of the sofa arm or mahogany table leg. The scratching post should be untipable and covered in sisal rope or the webbed reverse side of carpet (a fireplace log is also a good alternative). Do not cover the post with the same kind of fabric that you are trying to protect in your home—upholstery or carpeting. That will only confuse your cat.

An inviting bed. Cats will sleep where they want to, which is usually with you. If you do not want your cat in bed with you at night, you must provide a more appealing option, such as a soft pillow or an inviting old comforter. Anything soft and warm, especially if it has your scent on it, can attract your cat. But let your cat discover it; a cat who is forced

to lie down on a restricted spot will summarily reject that spot. And consider rethinking your policy against animals in bed. A purring companion at your feet is a better sleeping aid than anything you can find in a drugstore.

Toys. Many common household items make great cat toys. Ping-Pong balls are fun to chase. Or you can make a "mouse house" by cutting a hole in the bottom and the side of a paper bag; flick a wad of paper inside the bag and watch your cat ingeniously fish it out.

Avoid string, ribbon, or rolls of yarn. Cats' barbed tongues make it difficult for them to spit anything out once they begin to swallow it. Besides the potential for choking, string can cause serious problems if ingested.

When buying commercial cat toys, pick one that you could give to an infant. There should be no parts that can come off and be swallowed. Keep small children's toys away from cats. Contrary to the myth that cats only eat what's good for them, toy soldiers have found their way into cats' digestive tracts