

Cats Just Want to Have Fun

What is Environmental Enrichment?

Environmental Enrichment is the action of providing ways for cats to express their innate natural behaviors and engage their instincts inside the safety of their home. While cats have a safe indoor environment with us, their needs dictate activities that engage their outdoor natural instinctive behaviors. This includes exploring, climbing, jumping, predatory hunting, scratching, foraging to eat, problem solving, places to hide and social contact.

What is it for?

Bored cats will come up with a variety of ways to fulfill their own needs which may be annoying or problematic. These **redirected** natural instinctive behaviors may include scratching on furniture, jumping onto kitchen counters, self-mutilating behaviors (over grooming), attention seeking behaviors (pawing, knocking items off the shelf, weaving in and out of the guardian's legs or excessive meowing), nighttime activities, attacking in play and aggressive play. For some cats, boredom is so stressful it leads to health problems.

How can I provide environmental enrichment?

You can enhance your cat's environment in many different ways!

Interactive Play: Play with your cat several times a day. If he is young, keep the intensity high and play until he is panting tired. Find the right toy. Is your cat a birder? Mouser? Bugger? Consider shape, texture, and fur and move the toy in different ways—fast, slow and in stealth mode. The Cat Catcher and Cat Dancer get high marks. Wind down your playtime and allow your cat to catch the toy and give a treat as the ultimate kill. Be sure to hide interactive toys when you are not using them, so they are novel and exciting to your cat when you pull them out for playtime. If you use a laser pointer (some cats can get very frustrated with the laser pointer) always give a treat or wet food at the end of play.



Think Stealth: Have places for toys to disappear to recreate the hunt. Place a paper bag in the center of the room, pillows on the floor around the ottoman or cover a chair with a sheet or blanket. Add a Ripple Rug to make hunting interactive and non-interactive toys to be more enticing to your cat.

Non-Interactive Toys: Consider shape, texture, and fur. Roll, toss or hide toys in small boxes. Rotating toys and novelty are important, but cats do well with their scent on items, so leave a new toy in their area a few days before rotation. Use boxes, paper bags (handles removed), tissue or packing paper, tunnels, or ping



pong balls in the bathtub to stimulate your cat.

Scratching and Stretching: Consider both sturdy vertical scratching posts and horizontal scratchers in addition to places that provide a deep stretch. Your vertical scratcher should be taller than your cat when he stands up on his back legs. Scratchers can be made from cardboard or sisal.

Cat Friendly Furniture and Vertical Space: Find or build some cat condos, cat trees, cat towers and open ended shelves. Climbing and scratching are a part of a cat's daily activities.

Outside In! Cat safe window screens and door screens can bring in the smells of the outside along with the fresh air. As long as your cat is current on vaccinations and deworming, bring in tree branches, rocks, leaves and things from the outdoors to pique their senses. Try hiding treats around or under these items for extra fun, or fill a box with leaves and throw a handful of treats in for your cat to forage. Gazing out the window is another fun activity. Supply a window perch with soft bedding in a sunny spot then add instant entertainment with a squirrel and/or bird feeder.

Toy Puzzles: Use empty tooth paste boxes (ends open), or an empty Kleenex box and hide your cat's favorite mouse toy in it. Show it to them and let them figure out how to get it out.

Food Puzzles: Encourage your cat to think and use his natural feeding behavior to seek out food that is available to him! To help stimulate this instinct use food puzzles, slow food feeders, treat dispensers or hide small amounts of food in small containers throughout the house. Make it easy at first so it is rewarding to your cat. Use a commercial brand of hunting mice feeders or make your own, by using cupcake tins or ice cube trays for kibble. The idea is that your cat will spend a portion of their day employing their foraging instinct. With cat puzzles (some [dog puzzles](#) will work for cats) start out easy and work your way up to the more complex. Visit <http://foodpuzzlesforcats.com> for lots of ideas.

Water Fountains: Some cats love to drink from water fountains even more than they like to drink from your glass!

Cat Grass or Wheat Grass: Start your own from seed or buy grass already sprouted.

Catnip Therapy: You can use odor to stimulate your cat. Catnip, valerian and silver vine are popular choices. Place all soft fuzzy toys in containers with catnip, valerian or silver vine to "marinate". Do this as often as needed to refresh the scent.



Clicker Training: Clicker training is fun and can be used as both an enrichment tool and as part of a behavior modification plan. Cats can be trained to sit, come, and even walk on a leash and harness. Just like training dogs, clickers are a bridge that lets your cat know what it is that you want him to do and rewards him for doing that particular behavior.

Add a Buddy: Having a buddy is good entertainment as long as you have a cat that may enjoy the company of a friendly canine or feline friend. Check with Marin Humane's [cat behavior consultants](#) to see if your cat is likely to want a buddy.

Outdoor Enclosures (Catio): Having the ability to go into and out of a [catio](#) helps with boredom. For examples and ideas visit marinhumane.org/catenclosures

Education: Attend our [Feline Environment Enrichment](#) workshop for more ideas. Visit MarinHumane.org/catclasses

Behavior Resources:

Marin Humane's **Behavior & Training** department conducts various [cat workshops](#). Sign up at MarinHumane.org/catclasses. We have Cat Behavior Consultants who are available for questions and consultations (phone, online or in-home visit) please contact us at 415.506.6284 or CatBehavior@MarinHumane.org. More information about [cat behavior](#) is available on our website at MarinHumane.org/cathandouts.

