



BEHAVIOR
SERIES

Cat Toys and How to Use Them

ALTHOUGH CATS generally have different play styles than their canine counterparts, toys are as much a necessity for cats as they are for dogs. Toys help fight boredom and give cats an outlet for their instinctive prey-chasing behaviors. And when you are the one moving the toy around while your cat fishes for it, chases after it, or jumps in pursuit of it, playtime becomes a bonding experience for you and your cat.

“Safe” Toys

Our mothers always told us “no playing ball in the house,” but cats can usually participate in that forbidden exercise without knocking down a vase or a lamp (and being grounded for two weeks). Still, there are plenty of factors that may contribute to the safety of the toy they’re batting around.

Many of those factors are completely dependent upon your cat’s size, activity level, and preferences. Another factor to be considered is the environment in which your cat spends her time. Although we can’t guarantee your cat’s enthusiasm or her safety with any specific toy, we can offer the following guidelines.

Be Cautious

The things that are usually the most attractive to cats are often the very things that are the most dangerous. Cat-proof your home by removing string, ribbon, yarn, rubber bands, plastic milk jug rings, paper clips, pins, needles, dental floss, and anything else that could be ingested. All of these items are dangerous, no matter how cute your cat may appear when she’s playing with them.

Avoid or alter any toys that aren’t “cat proof” by removing ribbons, feathers, strings, eyes, or other small parts that could be chewed and ingested.

Soft toys should be machine washable. Look for stuffed toys that are labeled as safe for children under three years of age and that don’t contain any dangerous fillings. Problem fillings include things like nutshells and polystyrene beads. Remember that rigid toys are not as attractive to cats.

Recommended Toys

Active Toys

- Round plastic shower curtain rings, which are fun either as a single ring to bat around, hide, or carry, or when linked together and hung in an enticing spot.
- Plastic balls, with or without bells inside.
- Ping-Pong balls and plastic practice golf balls with holes to help cats carry them. Try putting one in a dry bathtub, as the captive ball is much more fun than one that escapes under the sofa. You’ll probably want to remove the balls from the bathtub before bedtime, or you may lose some sleep, as two o’clock in the morning seems to be a prime time for this game.

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