

PET TALES

Better box habits

A cat who's missing the litter box may be sending a message — so listen up!

BY DR. MARTY BECKER
and GINA SPADAFORI
Correspondent

When the weather turns colder and houses close up for warmth, every little thing starts to annoy us. Like the smell of the litter box, or (worse) the smell of a cat who's not using the litter box at all.

But don't blame the cat. If your cat is hit or miss where the litter box is concerned, chances are the choices you've made factor into the problem. After all, your cat really isn't asking for anything more than you would when it comes to a bathroom. All that's required for most cats is that the bathroom be clean, quiet and offer no surprises.

That sounds simple, but the failure to use a litter box is the top behavior complaint of cat lovers, sending countless cats to shelters every year. Before you even consider such a drastic step, you need to try to work things out with your cat if you have a litter box problem.

The first step in solving such a problem is to make sure it's not a medical condition — and that means a trip to your veterinarian for a complete workup. Urinary tract infections and diseases such as diabetes make consistent litter box use impossible for even the most well-intentioned cat. You cannot hope to get your cat using the box again until any health issues have been resolved.

If your cat checks out fine, you need to start working to make sure that everything about the box is to your cat's liking. The second rule of solving a litter box problem: If the



One of the secrets to having a cat use the litter box is to make sure the setup suits the cat. An unhappy cat will not use his box.

cat isn't happy, no one will be happy. Here's what to look for.

- Cleanliness. Cats are fastidious animals, and if the litter box is dirty, they look elsewhere for a place to go. Clean the box frequently — twice a day at least — and make sure it's completely scrubbed clean and aired out on a weekly basis. Having an additional litter box may help, too. (Multiple litter boxes are recommended for multicat households, since many cats simply will not share.)

- Box type and filler. Many choices people make to suit their own tastes conflict with the cat's sense of what's agreeable. A covered box may seem more pleasing to you, but your cat may think it's pretty rank inside or scary. Likewise, scented litters may make

you think the box smells fine, but your cat may disagree — not only is the box dirty, he reasons, but it also has this extra "clean" odor he can't abide. Start with the basics: a large box with unscented clumping-style litter.

- Location. Your cat's box should be away from his food and water, in a place he can get to easily and feel safe in. Consider a location from a cat's point of view: Choose a quiet spot where he can see what's coming at him. A cat doesn't want any surprises while he's in the box.

Make the area where your cat has had mistakes less attractive by cleaning it thoroughly with a pet-odor neutralizer (available from pet-supply retailers). Discourage reuse by covering the area with foil, plastic sheeting or plastic carpet runners with the points up.

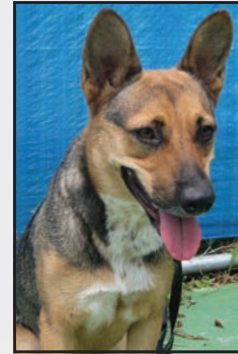
If changing things around doesn't clear up the problem in a healthy cat, you may need to retrain him by keeping your pet in a small area such as a guest bathroom for a couple of weeks.

Make sure the area you choose has no good options besides the litter box — no carpet, no pile of dirty laundry. Block off the bathtub or keep an inch of water in it to discourage its use as a place to go. After your cat is reliably using the litter box, let him slowly expand his territory again. As long as you keep up your end of the bargain and keep the litter box clean and safe, you have a good chance the good behavior will become permanent.

If you just can't seem to get the problem resolved, ask your veterinarian for a referral to a veterinary behaviorist. These veterinar-

ians are skilled in behavioral problem-solving and are able to prescribe medications that may make the difference during the retraining period. ■

Pets of the Week



>>Beauty
Beauty (372499) looks like a miniature German shepherd. She is a 3-year-old, medium-sized dog with a sweet personality to match her good looks. Beauty would be a faithful companion and lap dog. She is mellow and easy to walk on a leash.

To adopt a pet

To adopt a pet from Lee County Animal Services, call 432-2083 or visit our shelter located at 5600 Banner Drive, Ft. Myers, within Six-Mile Commercial Park off of Six Mile Cypress Parkway. Adoption hours are 10 am to 4:30 pm Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, 10 am to 7 pm Tuesday and 10 am to 2:00 pm Saturday. Adoption fee is \$65 for dogs and \$50 for cats. The adoption fee includes age appropriate vaccinations, spay/neuter surgery, flea treatment, worming, heartworm test for dogs, if six months or older, Feline Aids and Leukemia test for cats, a county license and microchip ID. Pictures of pets available for adoption can be viewed on line at www.leelostpets.com.

NEW **OREO** DESSERT PIZZA
Thin crust pizza topped with Vanilla sauce, Oreo Cookie crumbs & drizzled with white icing.

Only **\$3.99** with any purchase. Limited time offer.

<p>1</p> <p>A 1-Topping Pizza & 1 Side</p> <p>\$10⁹⁹ \$11⁹⁹ \$14⁹⁹ medium large x-large</p> <p>• Bread Sticks • Cheesy Bread • Cinna Stix® • 2 Liter of Coke®</p>	<p>5</p> <p>Two Pizzas, 2 Toppings & One Side</p> <p>\$15⁹⁹ \$18⁹⁹ \$21⁹⁹ medium large x-large</p> <p>• Bread Sticks • Cheesy Bread • Cinna Stix® • 2 Liter of Coke®</p>	<p>10</p> <p>One pizza "ANY WAY," 10 Buffalo Wings or Chicken Kickers & 1 Side</p> <p>\$17⁹⁹ \$19⁹⁹ \$22⁹⁹ medium large x-large</p> <p>• Bread Sticks • Cheesy Bread • Cinna Stix® • 2 Liter of Coke®</p>
<p>3</p> <p>A 1-Topping Pizza & 10 Buffalo Wings or Chicken Kickers</p> <p>\$13⁹⁹ \$15⁹⁹ \$18⁹⁹ medium large x-large</p>	<p>7</p> <p>CARRY OUT SPECIAL Large 1-Topping Pizzas</p> <p>\$8⁹⁹ each NO LIMIT Valid for Carry Out only</p>	<p>11</p> <p>Two Large Pizzas "ANY WAY," 10 Buffalo Wings or Chicken Kickers & 1 Side</p> <p>\$27⁹⁹</p> <p>• Bread Sticks • Cheesy Bread • Cinna Stix® • 2 Liter of Coke®</p>
<p>9</p> <p>One "ANY WAY," & One 1-Topping Pizza</p> <p>\$13⁹⁹ \$16⁹⁹ \$19⁹⁹ 2 medium 2 large 2 x-large</p> <p>*See our Feast Pizza menu and Available Toppings</p>	<p>8</p> <p>2X TUESDAY</p> <p>Buy any Large or X-Large Pizza at menu price & get a 2nd Pizza of Equal or Lesser Value FREE</p> <p>Must mention coupon when ordering. Valid on Tuesday only.</p>	<p>12</p> <p>555 DEAL</p> <p>Three Medium 1-Topping Pizzas</p> <p>\$5⁵⁵ each Make them large for \$7⁷⁷ each</p> <p>Minimum 3 pizzas. Deep Dish & additional toppings extra.</p>

334-3800
CENTRAL FT. MYERS
3674 Cleveland Ave.

936-4020
FT. MYERS
6631 Orion Dr.

267-1200
SAN CARLOS PARK
7021 Constitution Blvd.

433-4000
SOUTHWEST FT. MYERS
9270 College Pkwy.

NOW HIRING
PART & FULL TIME
POSITIONS AVAILABLE
APPLY IN STORE

REGARDING ENTIRE MENU: Offers are individual and not valid with any other offer. All offers available for a limited time. DEEP DISH, DOUBLE PORTIONS & ADDITIONAL TOPPINGS EXTRA. Tax not included. Must mention coupon when ordering. Delivery charge may apply. We accept credit cards at no extra charge. All personal and business checks require a 50¢ surcharge. Important Notice: Returned checks are subject to a \$25.00 charge. We may re-submit your check, or deposit a paper draft to withdraw a service charge in the amount of \$25.00, without your signature, for each returned check as permitted by law. Payment by check constitutes acceptance of these terms. Checks may not be accepted at all locations.