



Enrichment for Your Cat!

For the safety of your new cat, and the native wildlife, the AWLA recommends that you try to keep your cat mostly indoors. In order to keep your “mostly indoor” cat happy in mind and health it is important to provide him with some enrichment. Pet owners tend to be very good at providing enrichment for their companion dogs, but often fail to see the importance of providing enrichment for their cats as well!

There are four main types of enrichment that you can provide your cat: Touch or patting, food enrichment, play enrichment, and environmental enrichment. Below we have outlined some great ideas for these types of enrichment.

Food Enrichment

Cats were designed to hunt and use their sensory abilities, including sight, hearing and their problem-solving minds. However, we bore them to bits by feeding them food which does not move and we give it to them at the same time every day in a bowl. How boring! Cats need to be challenged to keep their minds and their bodies healthy. An excellent way to do this is to use food enrichment tools. Keep in mind that not all cats will respond to food enrichment and it is best used with cats who are highly “food driven.”

- **Scatter Feeds** – This is a great way to get a cat to use its brain – it is a feeding method that is often used in zoos for the same reason. To scatter feed simply take a portion of the cat’s daily dry food and scatter it on the floor in front of the cat. Before you scatter the food, get your cat to focus on you so they can see where you place the food. Cats are attracted to movement so this will also encourage them to go for the food.
- **Kong and Activity Balls** – These are specially made food enrichment tools. They come in a variety of sizes, colors, and patterns. They work by first placing dry food inside and then as the cat rolls it around, the food falls out. You can also place wet food in some of these toys, including the Kong. Experiment with different types of foods and treats your cat will like to play with in their Kong or similar toy.
- **Bottles** – This is like a home-made Kong. All you need to do is get a used water bottle that has been completely washed and dried out with all the labels taken off. Make a few holes around the outside, large enough so the dry food kibble can fall out. You’ll need about 10 holes for beginner cats. Fill the bottle half up with dry food, put the lid on and give it to the cat.
- **Feeding pyramids** – This feeding method provides excellent mental stimulation for a cat. You can make a feeding pyramid at home, all you need are 6 empty toilet rolls (or cut off some plastic piping for an even stronger version) and some masking or sticky tape. Stack the toilet like a pyramid – three rolls to make a bottom row, two rolls for the next row and one roll on the top. Place a few dry cat food treats or a portion of the cat’s dry food in each roll. At first, place the food near the opening of each roll, then gradually push the food further in so it is more challenging for the cat to reach.



Play Enrichment

Play is a fantastic way to bond with adult cats as well as kittens. It is important stimulation and exercise for your cat and is great for releasing frustration and boredom. Play is a tool to help not only the cat but also the relationship between the cat and their human companion. In play, a relationship develops between the cat and the person, with the person entering the cat's world and following the cat's lead, helping to form a relationship of trust.

There are several homemade cat toys that you can make for your cat instead of spending a lot of money on each new toy. Here are some examples:

- **Paper Ball** – simply a piece of paper rolled up into a ball. It will be more fun for your cat if you throw it across a wooden floor or tiles. It will roll well this way.
- **Ping Pong Cat Ball** – this is simply a ping pong ball!
- **Paper Bag Toy** – find a paper shopping bag (NOT a plastic one!) and leave it open somewhere in the middle of the room. It won't take long for your cat to come over and begin to inspect the bag and then start to play around with it.
- **String Cat Toy** – all cats love to chase a bit of dangling string. The important thing to remember is never to leave a cat along with a piece of string, he could get caught up in it or choke on it.

Environmental Enrichment

- **Climbing, Heights, and Hiding** – Cats love to climb and perch up high. You can allow your cat to climb onto furniture or shelving or get specially made cat climbing equipment such as a cat scratching post. Cats love to explore their environments. Help them explore by providing access to heights. Heights can also help insecure cats feel more relaxed. Combine heights with hiding spots to provide a stimulating environment. If you have more than one cat, provide many perching areas around your home. Cats also love to hide, and if you have a number of cats in your home it is essential you provide adequate numbers of hiding places also. An easy hiding spot that you can make is made by using an empty box! Simply turn an empty box upside down and cut a "doorway" into the box. Put the box on the ground and if your cat doesn't go inside the box, get a paper ball and throw it into the box while your cat is watching. You can also make holes in the top of the box and thread string through the hole, tying a knot at each end. Once your cat is in the box you can pull the string and watch your cat pull it back – tug-of-war!
- **Scratching Posts** – Scratching posts are another good way of providing your cat with high perches and landings to climb up onto. They also have the benefit of providing your cat with a good spot to scratch and stretch. Scratching posts vary in quality and price and as a general rule - you get what you pay for. Often the cheaper posts don't last very long and cats don't like to use them much anyway due to the post being "wobbly," making the cats feel insecure. In the long run you are better off investing in something that is of better quality, even if it is a bit more of an expense.