

# Choosing the Right Cat Toys

Cats are intelligent, energetic individuals, with individual preferences; they need stimulation and activity, and there are toys out there to satisfy any cat, especially if you spend time playing with them, too. When you're picking toys for your cat, your first consideration is safety. You have to know your cat to know what's safe: make sure that whole or part of the toy won't be ingested, particularly strings, feathers, or other small parts. Also check to see that toys are nontoxic and don't contain small filling pieces like polystyrene beads or nutshells.

## Variety is the Spice of Play!

Every cat should have lots of toys to fulfill different needs. If you bring them out a few at a time and rotate them every one to two weeks, they'll seem new all the time. Some of the best cat toys aren't things you buy; look around your house and you'll find many possibilities.

## Types of Toys

Toys to chase can be small fuzzy mice, balls (with or without bells inside, hard or soft), balls of waxed paper, shower curtain rings, and more. You can put any of these things onto a string or fishing pole for interactive play with your cat.

Toys to hunt and take down might be larger stuffed toys or even stuffed socks with the ends tied that your cat can grab onto and bite and kick -- like wild prey!

For exploring and ambushing, paper bags with the handles removed or cardboard boxes to hide in, or paper towel or toilet paper rolls, sometimes with something smaller inside, are fun. You can also find tunnels and crinkle sacks made specially for cats but remember that some cats will enjoy the noise of these toys but some cats may prefer a quieter place to hide in.

Catnip toys appeal to many cats (but not all). Catnip isn't addictive, and it's safe, but some cats do get overstimulated by it -- if your cat's one of those, you may want to avoid it. Most cats who enjoy it like to rub their faces, roll in it, or even eat it. You can get or make stuffed toys with catnip in them for your cat to rub on and carry around. You can also sprinkle catnip on their bed, scratching post, or on a towel or the carpet.

For interactive play most cats benefit from learning how to hunt their toys. Toys that are attached to the end of a string on a pole, like a fishing pole, are great for interacting with your cat. Fishing pole type toys come in all different sorts of styles including some that look like birds or bugs, some ribbon toys look like snakes and some have balls or small mice on the end of them. When interacting with your cat and your fishing pole toy try to mimic the same behavior as the simulated prey would (i.e. a snake slithering around the corner of a couch, a mouse darting from one hidden spot to another, a bird flying around and then landing for a bit). Your cat may spend time plotting and planning the take down of their prey so be patient and don't get discouraged if your cat doesn't immediately pounce. After 10-15 minutes of play, allow your cat to catch its' prey, and then end the play session with several yummy treats or a bit of canned food, a good hunt works up an appetite in your cat.

## Discover Your Cat's Play Style

Is your cat always jumping on top of things? Does he attack your ankles when you walk by? Does he dig in your potted plants or knock things over with his paws? All of these behaviors could lead you to more information about your cat's play style.

If your cat likes to climb on top of things and even knocks things off of high places, consider hiding toys in the places that your cat likes to climb up on. Give him appropriate things to knock off of high places rather than only leaving the things that you don't want him to bother. You can also

consider adding a unique scent to the toys so that your cat is more likely to jump down after he knocks the item off and sniff it. If your cat enjoys cat nip, you can put toys inside of cat nip containers infusing them with the cat nip scent.

If your cat is attacking your ankles when you walk by, he is definitely calling out to you for some ambush style play. He would probably enjoy a game played with a cat wand toy or a ribbon as it slinks across the floor.

Watch your cat's natural behavior and turn any nuisance behaviors into more appropriate ones by replacing his old habits with new ones.