



**Understanding and fulfilling your cat's enrichment needs is essential for their overall physical health, mental wellbeing and for preventing unwanted behaviours. More importantly, it deepens the bond between you and your pet.**

### What is Enrichment?

**Enrichment** for cats means providing opportunities to express natural behaviours critical to their health and happiness. Such behaviours include:

- **Scratching:** Essential for claw health, stretching muscles and communication via scent glands in their paws. Ensure that your cat has access to several scratching posts even if they are declawed.
- **Sniffing:** With their advanced sense of smell, cats rely on scent to explore their environment, communicate and mark their territory.
- **Chasing, Pouncing, Stalking and Hunting:** In play, these activities give cats an outlet for their predatory instincts.
- **Climbing and Perching:** High spots provide exercise, safety and comfort. They also allow cats to oversee their environment and feel secure.
- **Hiding:** Offers a secure space for solitude and stress relief.

Neglecting these needs can lead to stress-related behaviours such as destructive scratching, house soiling or conflicts with other pets and humans. It's imperative to integrate a variety of enrichment activities into your cat's daily routine to foster a healthy, stimulating environment.

### What Makes for Good Enrichment?

An effective enrichment strategy should *encourage natural behaviours* and *adapt to individual preferences*. Each cat is unique, and observing your cat's reactions to different activities will help tailor an enriching environment that they will thrive in. If your cat does not seem interested in the enrichment you provide, it is not actually enrichment for them! Take into account their age, health and mobility when selecting activities.

**Diversity in Enrichment:** Consistently rotating and introducing new enrichment activities are essential for maintaining your cat's interest. Think about how each activity engages their senses—sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch.

**Individual Resources:** In multi-cat households, provide each cat with their own set of resources in separate areas of the house—food bowls, water bowls, hiding places and litter boxes—to reduce conflict and stress.



**Tip:** The recommended minimum number of litter boxes is **one per cat plus one extra**. So, if you have two cats, there should be at least three litter boxes. Keep litter boxes far apart from each other and have at least one box per floor of your home.

If you have multiple cats, make sure to spend one-on-one time with each of them doing things they enjoy. This allows them to participate in activities they find rewarding, and these predictable, positive social interactions can also be bonding opportunities for you.

## Enrichment Ideas

*Be sure to remove hazards, such as string, which can be easily ingested when you are unable to supervise your cat. This precaution helps ensure their safety and well-being.*

### Enhance Their Environment:

- Provide multiple vertical spaces and hiding spots throughout the house.
  - Vertical spaces can be things like shelves, cat trees, steps and hammocks.
  - Hiding spaces can be things like tunnels, brown paper bags, cardboard boxes and beds with high sided or that are cave shaped.
- You can place things like cat trees and shelves near each other to form a continuous "cat highway". If you have multiple cats, ensure there are multiple ways to enter or exit to prevent one cat from blocking and trapping another.
- Build a Catio outdoors that provides a safe and secured enclosure for your cat where they can see, smell and hear the outdoors without risk of roaming.

### Scratching Posts:

- Place a variety of scratching posts made from different materials around your home, especially in areas where your cat already likes to scratch and near doors, windows and their bed. Ensure these posts are stable for your cat's safety. If using a vertical post, get one at least six inches taller than your cat, allowing them a big stretch while they scratch.

**Tip:** *If your cat scratches your chair legs, they may prefer vertical posts, while a cat that scratches rugs and carpets might prefer horizontal scratch pads.*

### Interactive Play:

- Dedicate time each day for interactive play using toys that simulate prey, like wands and feathers, to keep your cat physically active and mentally stimulated. We recommend having at least two play sessions a day between 10 to 15 minutes long. If your cat is younger or more high energy, they may require more play time.
- Incorporate safe play practices by using toys instead of your hands or feet to avoid injuries.
- We **do not** recommend using a laser pointer. Your cat may become frustrated or very focused on looking for the laser pointer, even outside of playtime.

### Sensory Enrichment:

- Introduce new scents using safe, cat-friendly options like catnip, silver vine or honeysuckle. These can be placed in toys and sprinkled on scratching posts.



- Be cautious with scented products around the home as cats are sensitive to smells; avoid using scented detergents or candles. Some essential oils are toxic to cats, so we don't recommend using them in diffusers or in enrichment.
- You can give them things to see by placing their bed near a window with a bird feeder, using catnip bubbles and turning on "Cat TV" on YouTube.

*Tip: An outside bird feeder might be frustrating for cats who enjoy hunting, potentially causing them to become agitated or overly aroused. Move their bed or the feeder if you notice this.*

### Feeding Enrichment:

- Use puzzle feeders, scatter food or hide it in snuffle mats or food dispensing toys to let them "hunt" for their food.
- Offer both still water bowls and water fountains to give your cat multiple drinking options.

### Training and Tricks:

- Cats can learn various tricks through clicker training. This not only entertains them but can also teach useful life skills!
- You can teach your cats cues like sit, come here, high five, go into your carrier and even how to wear a harness and leash to go on walks. Check our website for a handy guide on our [rewards-based training for cats](#).

### Additional Resources:

For more detailed guidance on engaging play, search online for:

- Dr. Mikel Delgado and Lili Chin's [infographic](#) on Interactive Cat Play and [the Fear Free article](#) on Cat Play the Right Way.

For more information about your cat's environmental needs:

- ["What Your Cat Needs to Feel Secure"](#) by Cat Friendly Homes

For DIY puzzle feeders and more tips:

- [www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com](http://www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com)

This enrichment guide aims to provide tips to enhance your cat's life through thoughtful and varied enrichment strategies. Remember, the key to a happy cat is an engaging environment that provides outlets for natural behaviours and is tailored to their unique needs and preferences.

**Did You Know?** You can also ask us behavioural questions by emailing:  
[askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com](mailto:askthespecialist@edmontonhumanesociety.com)

**It takes approximately \$7 million to keep the Edmonton Humane Society operational for one year and 40% of these funds come from generous donations made by supporters like you.**