

# Playtime for Kitties!

## Enriching Your Cat's Life

Cats and kittens in shelters benefit tremendously from social interaction and environmental enrichment. Whether you are fostering for a few days or a few months, environmental enrichment is a necessity and not a luxury. It's time to increase the fun factor in your foster cat's life! You will not only have a happier cat, but it will help prepare your foster cat for a new home and family. Customize whatever you do to fit your foster cat's age, mobility and health factors. Some cats will be more active than others, but every cat can benefit from a more stimulating environment.

- Cats who lack enrichment can be aggressive in play, both with people and with other animals in the household.
- Young cats without planned enrichment opportunities often pester their pet parents for play at inappropriate hours of the day and night. They may also interact destructively with furniture, plants or other objects in the house.
- Cats lacking enrichment can become reclusive and are more likely to retreat from new people or objects that enter their homes than cats who are frequently exposed to a variety new sights and sounds.

## Enrichment opportunities can easily be provided for cats. Here are some ideas to try:

- Self-play toys are especially good for cats who are left home alone while their people are away. Most self-play toys dispense food, which motivates the cat to play with the toy. The basic principle is that you fill up the toy with dry kibble, and the cat learns to manipulate the toy to release the food out of a hole. You can either buy food-dispensing toys or make your own. Examples of purchased toys are Kitty Kongs and Roll-a-Treat Balls. You can make your own toys with such objects as racquet or tennis balls, or clean yogurt containers with plastic lids. Cut a hole into the ball or container, fill it up with dry kibble, and, presto, your cat is entertained. Another type of food-dispensing toy is Pavlov's Cat, which releases dry food when a cat scratches the toy. Self-play toys that do not dispense food are not nearly as exciting for the average cat. However, some cats find balls on springs or a wall- or door-mounted Cat Dancer (rolled cardboard paper pieces on a spring coil wire) irresistible.
- Interactive toys help strengthen the bond between you and your foster cat by letting you share fun and positive experiences. This will help prepare the cat for positive interactions with her new family. Both you and your foster cat can have a great time playing with wand-type toys with strings, feathers, and fabric attached. The Cat Dancer, mentioned above, can also be used as an interactive toy. Some cats enjoy playing with laser pointers, chasing the point of light around the house. Low-cost (or no cost) toys are often the cat's preferred toys. Some suggestions are wadded-up paper or foil balls and plastic rings from milk jugs.
- Provide a variety of toys for your foster cat. Some cats prefer toys that they can throw around themselves. Other cats prefer toys that require participation by you, such as those you wiggle

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- and dangle. Stimulating play for a cat involves opportunities to “hunt,” so move toys in such a way that they mimic the movements of a rodent or bird. Introduce new toys periodically to keep your foster cat from becoming bored.
- Provide objects for your cat to explore, such as cardboard boxes, paper shopping bags, packing paper and toys that encourage her to investigate various holes with her paws (do not use plastic bags). A dripping water tap can provide hours of fun! Rotate playtime objects frequently so that your cat doesn’t become bored.
- Some cats appreciate the commercially available “cat videos.” The most popular ones contain close-ups of birds and small rodents. Many cats can watch the same videotape for hours each day, tracking the animals’ movements, growling or chirruping and swatting at the screen.
- To “virtually” let your foster cat spend time outside, place perches or resting areas by windows in your home. Something as easy as clearing off the back of a couch by the window can expand your foster cat's horizons. A birdbath or bird feeder within sight of the window can increase your foster cat's enjoyment; the birds easily habituate to their admirers. Watch out for roaming cats in your yard, though, since the sight of those other cats can trigger stress and possibly urine marking in the indoor cat.
- Training your foster cat can give her a great mental workout. Just like dogs, cats can learn a number of useful behaviors and fun tricks, like sit, come when called and shake. You can even train your cat using a clicker. See [www.clickertraining.com](http://www.clickertraining.com) for more information.

**We value your input about our foster program. Please let us know if you have questions, ideas, or suggestions. Together, we can make our foster program even better! Contact the Foster Manager at [foster@ashevillehumane.org](mailto:foster@ashevillehumane.org) or call (828) 768-5451 if you have any questions.**

