

# Appendix 1

## Environmental Enrichment

Cats may spend a lot of time asleep, but when they are awake they require sufficient mental and physical stimulation to keep them entertained. A cat's physical surroundings are very important; an impoverished environment that does not provide the opportunity for movement, exploration and rewarding mental challenges can lead to boredom and frustration and be a common contributory factor in the development of behaviour problems. Environmental enrichment is therefore essential, especially for cats that do not have regular outdoor access to an area large enough to allow them to hunt and explore.

### Space

Cats should have sufficient space to run around. It is quite normal for a household cat to occasionally run around the house at high speed as a means of energy expenditure. But, as well as floor space, a cat also needs to have access to vertical space at varying levels, for climbing, exploring and resting. Access to shelves, high furniture and even stairs can allow this, but additional levels can also be provided in the form of cat trees (Fig. A1.1) and walkways (Fig. A1.2).

### Hiding Areas

Even the most confident cat will need places to hide occasionally. But hiding places are not just used when a cat feels at threat, they can also be used in play, as areas to explore and places to retreat to when the cat does not want to be disturbed. Suitable hiding places can include gaps under furniture, covered beds and cardboard boxes. (Fig. A1.3).

### Food Foraging and Food Puzzles

If we did not feed them, cats would need to hunt several times a day for their food. Having food placed in a dish in front of them may be the easy option but it can also be quite boring. It can be a lot more exciting and interesting for a cat if food is provided in way that requires some element of challenge to get it.

The easiest way to make a cat work for its food is to just scatter dried food over the floor for the cat to sniff out. But you can also buy and/or make food puzzles or food foraging toys to add in extra challenge and fun for the cat.



**Fig. A1.1.** A simple cat tree providing extra vertical space.

### Stationary puzzles

These usually require the cat to use its paws to get the food and require a varying degree of skill and effort. Simple mazes or obstacles and food-containing compartments with sliding covers that the cat pushes or pulls open are a common feature.

### Homemade versions

- Place small amounts of either wet or dry food in an ice cube tray.
- Cut holes in the sides of a plastic food container or small cardboard box and place food inside. If using a plastic container, ensure that the edges of the holes are not sharp before giving it to your cat.
- Stick cardboard toilet roll or kitchen paper inners together in a rough pyramid shape and place a few pieces of dry food or cat treats inside each tube.
- Cut cardboard kitchen paper inners into varying lengths, each shorter than the cat's front legs. Then stick the tubes upright onto a base. Pour a little dry food into each tube.



**Fig. A1.2.** Indoor cat walkways. Similar constructions can also be provided in outdoor enclosures. Pictures courtesy of Tanya Cressey and Pause Cat Café, Bournemouth.



**Fig. A1.3.** A cardboard box can be an easy and inexpensive way of providing environmental enrichment.

### **Moving puzzles**

These are food toys that the cat needs to make move to get the food or treats. The simplest design is a plastic ball with at least one hole in it. Dry food and/or treats are put inside the toy which fall out as the cat pushes the ball along with his paw or nose. But there are other designs in the form of tubes or ‘dangling’ toys that the cat must ‘bat’ to get the food to release, and individual small toys containing food, that are intended for the cat to treat as pretend prey. Most of these are only suitable to be used with dried food.

### **Homemade versions**

- Seal up the ends of a cardboard toilet or kitchen roll inner, make a few holes in the tube and then pour in few treats and/or dried food.
- Punch 1–2 holes in the bottom of an old yoghurt pot, just large enough so that small pieces of food will fall out if the pot is shaken. Attach some string to the top and the tie to a door handle or somewhere similar so that it is just above your cat’s head height. To get the food your cat will need to hit the pot with his paws to get the food to fall out.
- Make holes in a small plastic pot or similar item that can be made to move freely when the cat bats or taps it with its paws.

### **Points to consider**

- If a cat has never used a food puzzle before it is best to initially buy one that requires minimum skill or effort or one where the difficulty can be increased from an easy starting point. If the puzzle is too difficult for the cat it could cause frustration.
- The toy should not be flimsy; it should be reasonably solid and well made. Most are made of plastic, which could produce dangerous sharp edges if they break.
- Many can be used with either wet or dry food, but some are specifically designed for one or the other. Make sure that the puzzle is suitable for use with the cat’s preferred food and treats.
- The puzzle should be easy to clean, especially if using wet food.

- Look at food puzzles designed for dogs as these can also be suitable for cats.
- To make each game as attractive as possible for your cat, add in a few extra tasty treats alongside the cat's everyday food.
- Safety must always be of prime importance when making home-made toys, especially those that are designed to hold food for your cat. So, make sure that there are no sharp edges and you are careful to only use safe non-toxic materials.

## Reference and Further Reading

Food puzzles for cats ([www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com](http://www.foodpuzzlesforcats.com))

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