

To Litter or Not to Litter...

Is that your question?

Cat owners know the aisle well.

It is one of the essentials of being owned by a cat – knowing which litter they like, which litter pan is best and where to put it for maximum benefit. Dog owners, however, seldom think beyond the leash and the doorknob. Dogs get walked to do their duty, right? You bring your pooper-scooper or plastic bag and throw it away, even on rainy nights or with snow above your knees. Well, there are other options for your dogs now, just as for your cats. If you have adopted both cats and dogs, the option of using a litter box for both may be especially appealing.

Dog litter boxes are designed for ease of use.



Option is not just for cats anymore

Check out the aisle in your local pet supermarket that carries litter pans and litter for your new puppy or current dog. Even an old dog can learn the new “trick” of having an available inside source for emergencies. This option will also give you more flexibility and less worry when you can’t make it home in time for “duty” walks. Senior dogs may also need to urinate more frequently and are often less able to “hold” it; if they have their own litter pan, it *might* help prevent a few accidents. (Incontinence in older or special needs animals is a unique situation and may require the services of your veterinarian. Do not hold this against your dog or cat—they can’t control it and it is just as humiliating to them as it is inconvenient for you!)



Cat litter boxes come in many styles and shapes.

Remember though that your dog still needs exercise and that daily walk you both take can now provide exercise; teach socialization with other dogs and strangers, as well as helping the two of **you** bond more closely. Never give up that special pleasure with your best friend.

What to look for in a cat litter

When choosing a litter for your cat, you have many options. The more prudent choices are the litters that are labeled flushable, no additives, scoopable, natural. Examples are Vetbasis, World’s Best Cat Litter, along with many others.

Why? Pure clumping litters are generally flushable, which means they do not break down in water. Think about what this could possibly mean in your cat’s stomach. (Yes, they do clean, as in lick, their paws afterwards! Cats are very fastidious creatures.) Cats have been brought in for emergency surgery to remove blockages caused by clumping cat litters, and some owners have observed that their cat’s regurgitations contain this material. Also, pine and wood litters may contain oils that could be toxic to your cats, causing them to develop respiratory issues or, worse, to die. Do your research before buying.



What’s appealing for dogs

Usually newspaper. There are litters made especially for dogs from recycled newspaper, which is attractive to dogs, along with litter pans made especially for dogs—easy in, easy out. There are even frames to hold piddle pads in place while houstraining puppies.

With all the choices available nowadays, choosing the right option for your pet is as easy as... visiting your local pet store or pet supermarket!



HOW TO ...

It’s generally no different to train your dog to go in the litter pan than when you originally trained him or her to do their business outside. The one thing you need to remember is to not punish them if they miss or when they go elsewhere inside. This typically only makes them find places where they think they can “hide” it from you, or discourages them from learning to “go inside” the litter pan.

Putting their litter pan near the door they use to go outside is generally a good place. Or, if they have already chosen their spot in the house, put the litter box there. There are also attractants you can spray in the litter pan. Once they start using the box, praise them. Let them know it is what you expect from them. Dogs, after all, love us and just want to please us. With a little time and patience, you can re-train your dog, even senior dog, to use a litter pan.

And if at first you and your dog don’t succeed, don’t give up... they can learn with your help and patience.

One word of caution: if you have a Great Dane, make sure you have a litter box BIG enough to handle the load!

Reprinted with permission from October 2005 issue of

strays