

How to Cat-Proof Your Home

Protect your Valuables and Your Cat at the Same Time

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Updated 08/08/17



Cats are curious critters and, once you bring your cat home, it will want to explore every inch of your house. Like a small child, your cat will get into things it shouldn't unless you keep potentially harmful objects out of reach. Think of your cat as an eternal toddler, and follow these vital rules to keep it safe.

THE SAFE ROOM

Set aside a "safe room" for your new arrival. Put her food dish, water, litter box, toys, scratching post and bed in it. Give this room a thorough going over. Once kitty is comfortable in her new surroundings, it will be time to let her explore the rest of your happily cat-proofed home.

PUT AWAY STUFF

Protect Valuables: Cats are curious. That's one of their main jobs - being curious. So you won't want to leave your Ming Dynasty antique vase sitting on the coffee table. Because about ten seconds into Kitty's first exploration of the house, she will spring up on the table and topple the Ming Dynasty. Vase, that is.

Breakables: Put away any breakable treasures that are remotely accessible to your cat. Jumping up onto high places (like shelves and counters) is innate cat behavior; trying to stop it will be stressful for both you and kitty. Instead, put yourself into the mind of the cat, get down on the floor at her level, look around, and remove anything you value.

Other Destructables: Kittens will climb your furniture and drapes. Consider covering cloth furniture with a purchased cover, or even with a blanket or bedspread. Confine drapes to off-limit rooms.

POTENTIAL POISONS

Plants: Many common household plants are poisonous to cats. They range from lily-of-the-valley and daffodil to rhododendron and hydrangea. Ingestion causes symptoms from stomach upset to convulsions, organ failure and death. The ASPCA and many other organizations have detailed lists that can be found on line. If your cat really enjoys eating greens, safe plants can be purchased at your local pet supply store.

Chemicals: Chemical cleaning products are poisonous if your cat ingests them. If using chemical cleaners concerns you, substitute safe cleaning products such as vinegar/water mixtures or baking soda, or the many organic products available. Cats are fastidious, so if you do use chemical cleaning products, wash away the residue so your cat will not get it on its feet or fur. To keep your cat from opening cabinets where cleaning products are stored, attach safety latches to the cupboard.

Antifreeze: All antifreeze products are poisonous to cats. Even antifreeze made of propylene glycol is toxic if your cat ingests enough of it, so keep spills cleaned up.

Drugs: Common anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin and ibuprofen are extremely toxic to cats, as are analgesics such as acetaminophen. If your cat ingests only two regular strength Tylenol tablets within a 24-hour period, it may be lethal. Keep all medications out of your cat's

reach and don't let your cat find and play with pills that may have fallen to the floor. Pick them up right away.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDS

Furniture: Certain types of furniture are potentially dangerous to cats. **Recliner chairs** can trap a cat that crawls inside, so check for your cat's presence under the leg rest or inside the recliner before returning it to an upright position. **Rocking chairs** can roll on a cat's tail or foot, so make sure your cat isn't sitting near the rocker when you decide to take a break.

Ironing boards: Ironing boards left standing can topple over and injure your cat, so put them away when you're finished. Hot irons can cause burns to your cat—and start a fire!

Clothes dryers: Because cats like to snuggle in small, warm places, they often crawl into the dryer if the door is left open. Many cats have perished when their owners turn the dryer on without realizing the cat is inside. Close the dryer door after you remove your clothes to keep your cat from taking a nap in a potentially dangerous location.

Electrical cords: To keep your cat from accidentally electrocuting itself, tie up loose electrical cords or conceal them in hard plastic or rubber tubes purchased at the hardware store. If your cat hogs the heat from heating vents in the winter, fit it with an elastic or break-away collar so it can pull away if its ID tags become caught in the grate.

Small objects: Small objects such as coins, pins, needles, rubber bands, paper clips, staples, nails, screws, yarn, thread, dental floss, earrings and other small jewelry, bells from toys and small balls left lying around can lodge in kitty's digestive tract if swallowed. Keep them safely out of your cat's reach and avoid expensive surgery to remove them.

Windows: Keep your cat from accidentally falling or escaping through an open window. Make sure windows and screens are secure and safe. Remember: cats don't always land on their feet.

Hanging blinds cords: Kittens will love to bat around cords from hanging blinds, but can also get tangled up in them with disastrous consequences. The safest bet is to tie the cords up out of reach

Toilet: The toilet can be a popular watering hole for a cat. A small kitten could fall in and drown, or a cat could be poisoned if the toilet contains a toilet bowl cleaner. Keeping the lid down will prevent a feline tragedy.

Pest Poisons: Remove any ant or roach traps from accessible areas.

Small Hazards: Rubber bands, paper clips, thumb tacks, broken balloons, Christmas tree tinsel and other small articles are tempting play objects for cats, but pose a choking hazard. Put them away in containers, and leave the tinsel off the tree this year. Keep plastic bags and bags with small handles out of reach of your cat.

The Garage

It's best just to make the garage off-limits to your cat. Too many poisonous/hazardous materials are stored there. Anti-freeze is the worst because pets are attracted by its taste. Clean up all spilled anti-freeze pronto.

No house is 100% safe, but you can reduce the risk to your cat and create a cat-friendly environment by vigilantly keeping potential hazards to a minimum.

Welcome home, Kitty!