

8 Ways to Appreciate Your Cat

By Cheryl Lock

Unlike dog owners, cat owners may think it's next to impossible to show their pets how much they love them. It's not harder, it's just different, explains Pam Johnson-Bennett, cat expert and author of *CatWise*.

"Cats are not dogs in cat costumes, so it's important to understand what cats enjoy from us and how/when they enjoy it," she says. "Even within the species, cats can have particular preferences when it comes to the ways we show our appreciation."

Partake in Interactive Play Sessions

Besides providing fun and exercise for your cat, interactive play sessions are one of the best ways to strengthen your bond and build trust, Johnson-Bennett says. "If done the right way, you are giving the cat the opportunity to do what she's best at—being an amazing hunter," she adds.

Dr. Sandy M. Fink, clinical quality lead with pet health line whiskerDocs, agrees. "Stimulate your cat's predatory instincts with stalking, chasing, and catching games using, ping pong balls and teaser toys," she suggests. "Limit interactive play to short, 5- to 10-minute sessions several times a day." Do not leave a cat or kitten un-attended with toys with feathers.

Accept and Reciprocate Their Affection

Cat affection isn't always bold—sometimes you have to really be on the lookout for it. "Some people misinterpret certain signs of cat affection, like when they rub and mark you with their scent, as simply claiming you as their property," Johnson-Bennett says. "But it's actually a very affectionate and loving feline display. Consider it on the level of a kiss or a hug."

Groom Them

This can actually be a very pleasurable experience for your cat if you train him on the procedure and you pay attention to his body language and preferences. "Grooming is an expression of love because you're helping to keep your cat's coat, nails, teeth, and ears in good shape," Johnson-Bennett says. Remember that with older or injured cats, extensive grooming is best left to professionals, Fink adds. You can start kittens early by using a toothbrush-it reminds them of their mom's tongue grooming them.

Take the Time to Learn What Your Cat Likes

Not all cats like having a fuss made over them, and some don't enjoy cuddling at all. Pay attention to your cat's body language and familiarize yourself with her likes and dislikes. "The key is to know your cat so there are no misinterpreted gestures," Johnson-Bennett says. "Cats are master communicators and they often give more than one signal to indicate that they would enjoy more interaction with us or they'd like us to keep our distance."

"You can encourage your cat with treats to be more sociable or use calming treats and pheromone sprays to help some cats relax, but never try to force an interaction when the cats' actions says she's done," Fink adds. Instead, she suggests creating a cat-friendly, stress-free environment as a way to show you care.

Feed Them a Healthy Diet

Your cat depends on you for his nutrition, so it's important to make informed choices. "Feed a high-quality diet that's appropriate for your cat's life stage and health," Johnson-Bennett suggests. Cats also thrive on predictability and routine, Fink says, so try your best to feed your cat at the same time each day.

Reward Good Behavior

Treats can be a powerful motivating tool when your cat displays good behavior. "Use treats and non-food rewards, such as playtime, as training tools that will have the added bonus of strengthening the bond you share with your cat," Johnson-Bennett says. Fink also recommends clicker training. "It's a wonderful way to connect with a shy or timid cat, and how-to instructions are readily available on the internet," she says. "Remember, behaviors that are rewarded will be repeated." Do not treat treats, as food...they are too high calorie-use treats such as "Greenies" (for cats) that also clean their teeth.

Get Them Checked Regularly at the Vet

Your cat may not necessarily interpret a trip to the vet as a sign of affection, but "it's a crucial part of keeping your cat healthy," Johnson-Bennett says. "What better way to show love and appreciation than to prevent potential future health problems and treat current ones as soon as possible to minimize pain and suffering?"

Keep in mind that cats instinctively hide symptoms of illness to avoid predators, Fink says, which makes regular appointments all the more important. "Cats should be seen annually and at least twice a year if they are geriatric or already diagnosed with a chronic disease."

Flea preventive: Only buy name brands approved by your vet..."Off brands" are NOT regulated and can produce catastrophic results. Best are ones that also prevent heartworms, other worms and treats ear mites such as Revolution for Cats or Advantage Multi for Cats.

Respect Your Cat's Personal Space

While it might be difficult to give your cat space, there will be times that he prefers to relax by the window or in his bed without being bothered. "Respect any body language signals he gives that say he'd like to be left alone," Johnson-Bennett says. "He may look hard to resist when he's curled up in his bed, but it doesn't mean it's always OK to go over and wake him up with hugs and kisses."



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