

Choosing the best toy for a cat is much easier with a basic understanding of how and why a cat plays. Cats play to sharpen their hunting skills. This means catching something and ‘killing’ it. Some cats love to stalk, some love to leap, some love to wrestle. Certain toys satisfy these needs better than others. Here are some guidelines to consider when selecting a cat toy:

- A cat toy should not have little bits and pieces that come off easily. Eyes, tails and other bits that are glued on can be easily chewed off and choked on. Pull these pieces off and get rid of them before you give the toy to the cat.
- ‘Fishing pole’ type toys have great appeal for most cats. With most toys, the cat has to make her own fun, but with fishing pole toys, you make the fun. The movement of the toy is much less predictable, and thus more fun. In addition, this type of toy keeps the cat at a distance from you, so a frisky kitty is much less likely to accidentally ‘catch and kill’ one of your fingers or toes.
- Great toys: Cat Dancer, Cat Charmer, Da’ Bird, Glitter Balls (the large ones. The small ones are easily swallowed), a laser pointer, catnip mice (with eyes pulled off, of course), Turbo Scratcher, ping-pong balls, caps from gallon jugs, pen caps, small balls of paper.
- A cat should never be unsupervised with any toy that involves yarn or string. Cats have a very rough tongue, so when a cat starts to swallow, it is nearly impossible for her to spit something out, and a string can easily be swallowed whole. The string is likely to tangle in the cat’s digestive tract and require expensive surgery to save the cat’s life.
- A good general rule is: If you wouldn’t give the toy to a toddler, don’t give it to your cat.

Just like people, cats get bored if they are presented with the same toys all the time. Toys should only be left out for a couple days at a time. If you rotate the toys every five days or so, you are in effect giving the cat a whole new set of toys.

Many cats like a ‘busy box’. Take a low box and cut holes in it. Make the holes just a bit smaller than the size of a catnip mouse or a glitter ball. Put several toys inside the box. You might have to coax the cat a bit, but once she realizes what’s in the box, then the fun begins. Many cats have a great time trying to fish the toys out of the box.

An important rule to remember: Never play rough with your hands or feet! You will be teaching your cat that biting and scratching is acceptable. You may find it adorable for your kitten to grab your arm, nibble and kick, but in a year, you will have a full-grown cat that has been taught to scratch and bite. Always try to keep the cat at a distance from you when you are playing.