

TRICKS ARE FOR KITTY

**DEVELOP A BETTER RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR CAT
WHILE SHE LEARNS THESE 6 TRICKS.**

BY SASSAFRAS LOWREY

TRICK TRAINING ISN'T JUST FOR DOGS! Although cats are thought of as stubborn and independent, they are highly intelligent and are able to have a lot of fun learning tricks. Trick training isn't about telling your cat what to do; it's an opportunity to bond and develop a stronger relationship with your cat.

For Arden Moore, an author, pet behavior consultant, radio-show host and pet first-aid/CPR instructor, teaching tricks to her cats isn't just a hobby, it's part of her business. "My two confident orange tabbies, Casey and Rusty, team up with my Terrier mix, Kona, and me to conduct in-person and Zoom interactive classes all over the country," she says. "We conduct pet behavior and pet first-aid classes. We also visit animal shelter critter camps for kids and nursing homes to visit residents."

Training can not only be fun for your cat, it can actually improve your cat's quality of life. Trick training can give your cat an outlet for getting more physical exercise, and it can provide important mental stimulation as well. "Schooled cats are less apt to display unwanted behaviors, such as furniture scratching, waking you up too early, yowling or attacking your ankles," Arden explains. "These unwanted behaviors are often triggered by boredom or the inability to unleash pent-up energy."

IS YOUR CAT TRAINABLE?

When you start talking about teaching tricks to your cat, people might laugh. They mistakenly think cats are stubborn

and untrainable, but in reality, cats are not only intelligent, they love learning new things.

"The most trainable cats tend to be those who have good attention spans, outgoing personalities and who are highly motivated by food, praise or grooming sessions," Arden says. The key, like teaching any species, is finding your cat's currency: what kind of treat or toy she finds most rewarding. "Before you launch into teaching tricks, devote a few days to look at your cat in a whole new way," she says. "Focus your attention more on your cat's actions and habits. By understanding cat chat and feline body cues, you will strengthen your communication skills with your cat."

GETTING STARTED

None of us want to work for free. Learning tricks is fun but also hard work, and your cat deserves to be compensated with what she likes most — treats and toys.

Arden says that with her own cats, "Casey and Rusty are very food motivated, and I use that to my advantage when teaching them — and getting them — to perform tricks at home, in classes and at pet conferences."

Try small bits of cat-safe people food like cooked, unseasoned meat or commercially available cat treats. What is most rewarding to one cat may not be as rewarding to another, so there may be some trial and error finding what is most motivating to your cat. Don't be afraid to experiment with different treats to figure out what is the highest value.

Train where your cat is comfortable. For some cats, →



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that will be elevated up on the couch or your bed, while others will prefer you getting down on the floor with them to train. When first getting started, try different areas and see where your cat is most comfortable.

For some cats, training solo with quiet time is important, so they don't get distracted. Other cats, like my youngest cat, Thing, prefers and is most skilled at learning and most interested when he is training with my dogs, who he is very closely bonded to.

Things you'll need to trick train

1. **Treats** that are high value to your cat. Don't forget to try different things to find out what she likes best. Don't over-feed, so feed her a little less dinner if you are going to give her a lot of treats to trick train.
2. **Toys** that your cat enjoys playing with.
3. **Clicker** (optional) if you want to use one as part of your training; you can find one at most pet supply shops or order online.



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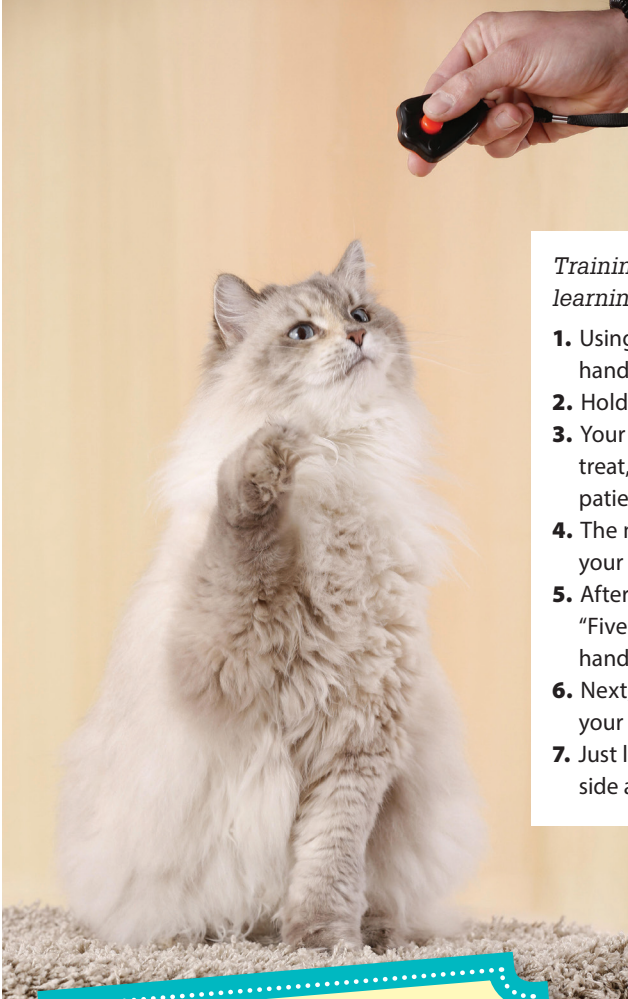
TRICKS TO TEACH YOUR CAT

When it comes to trick-training sessions, a little goes a long way. Short training sessions multiple times a day are much more effective than one long training session where you and your cat are likely to get frustrated or tired. Always keep your training sessions fun and upbeat, and stop a session while your cat is engaged and successful.

SIT

Sit is a fun introductory trick that is easy for most cats to master.

1. Get your cat's attention with a treat.
2. Bring the treat down to your cat's nose and slowly pull the treat up and slightly back.
3. As your cat's nose follows the treat up and back, her bottom will go down.
4. As soon as your cat gets into the sitting position, click or verbally mark with a "Yes" or "Good" and give kitty the treat.
5. Repeat several times.
6. When your cat is consistently following the treat into the sitting position, start to introduce your verbal cue "Sit."
7. Slowly phase out the treat lure the more experienced your cat becomes.
8. Treat your cat while she is still in the sitting position. You want to reinforce that sitting is what gets the treat.



HIGH FIVE

Training is fun! Give your kitty a high five for all the smart learning she is doing with this trick.

1. Using a treat your cat is excited about, put some of it in one of your hands and close your fist around it.
2. Hold your hand up to your cat and wait.
3. Your cat will explore your hand trying to figure out how to get at the treat, possibly even nuzzling or licking your hand. The key is to be patient until your cat offers her paw to try to get at the treat.
4. The moment your cat's paw touches your hand, praise and open your hand to give her the treat.
5. After a few repetitions, start introducing your verbal cue "Shake" or "Five." By now your cat will start to understand that pawing at your hand is what releases the treat.
6. Next, hold up your open-palmed hand without a treat in it. When your cat reaches up with her paw, praise and treat.
7. Just like people are right or left-handed, cats also have a right and left side and may more naturally be inclined to offer up one paw or another.

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TRICK TITLES for CATS

If you and your cat are having fun with trick training, your cat can actually earn trick titles from the comfort of your own home.

The organization DMWYD (Do More With Your Dog) is the oldest trick titling organization and is very welcoming to feline participants! DMWYD trick titles can be earned by kitties anywhere in the world.

The structure of the program is that titles are earned via video submission. CTDI (Certified Trick Dog Instructors) review these videos and, once approved, cat guardians can submit the titles directly to DMWYD and they will be mailed an official title certificate and ribbon.

For Novice (the first level), cats must perform 15 different tricks. After that cats can earn Intermediate, Advanced, Expert and Championship titles. You can find the breakdown of tricks for each level of titling at domorewithyourdog.com (despite the name cats are welcome and encouraged to participate!)



SPIN

For this trick, your cat will spin in circles either left or right depending on your cue. Similar to being right or left pawed, your cat may be more likely to spin one way versus the other.

1. Show your cat the treat, and with her nose on the treat lure her in a wide circle. When she comes all the way back around, praise and treat.
2. As you practice, start adding in your verbal cue "Spin" or "Around."
3. Practice luring your cat to spin both left and right.
4. When your cat is consistently spinning, start to phase out the wide-circle lure as your cat understands that the verbal cue and a small physical cue means you are asking her to spin in a circle.

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SKATEBOARDING



We've all seen the viral videos of skateboarding cats on social media. Most cats are probably not going to get excited about learning how to ride a skateboard, but if you have a young, energetic and treat-motivated cat, she just might be interested in giving it a try!

SUPPLIES NEEDED:

Skateboard — purchase a lightweight mini skateboard, which will be easier for cats to maneuver

High-value treats that your cat likes

Open area of your home with carpeting

A blanket

Start skateboarding inside for your cat's safety. Also start on carpeting so that the board doesn't roll too quickly from under your cat and scare her. This will allow kitty to keep better control over the board.

TWO-PAWS PUSH:

1. Use a treat to bring your cat next to the back of the board.
2. With the treat on your cat's nose, lift the treat up and forward. Your cat's head and front feet will follow. As soon as your cat's front feet are on the board — praise and treat.
3. After a few repetitions, add a verbal cue like "Paws up."
4. Keep feeding your cat treats in position with her paws on the board as it starts to slightly move.
5. As your cat gains confidence putting paws on the skateboard and the small amount of movement, move the skateboard from the carpet to a towel or blanket, which still provides a bit of resistance but allows the board to move more as your cat puts his front paws onto it.
6. When your cat is comfortable at that level of movement, put the board onto hardwood or other smooth floors.
7. Cats that tend to excel at skateboarding will naturally begin to find their own stride with pushing and riding the board at this stage.

If at any step your cat seems nervous, or uncomfortable, move the skateboard back to a surface where the board will move less, and keep those treats going!

FOUR-PAW-ON RIDING:

For a cat riding the skateboard with all four paws, start slow to make sure your cat doesn't get stressed or fearful.

1. With treats your cat is excited about, lure your cat onto the skateboard, which is inside your home on carpet. When your cat has all four feet on the skateboard — reward and treat.
2. After several repetitions with the board staying still while the skateboard is still on carpet, gently begin to rock it forward with one hand while treating your cat with the other.
3. If your cat jumps off or is uncomfortable for the next repetition, just treat your cat for being four paws onto the board.
4. When your cat is comfortable with a small amount of movement of the skateboard, move the skateboard first to



a blanket and then to hardwood floors. Keep treating your cat anytime the skateboard is in motion. The goal is for your cat to make positive associations (treats!) with being on the skateboard as it is moving.

5. As your cat gains confidence with riding a moving skateboard, begin to decrease the number of treats you are giving, so instead of feeding your cat the entire time he is riding the board, decrease the rate of treats to a small push and then treat.

TRICKS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Trick training is great for cats' physical and mental health, but it also makes your cat more confident and comfortable in otherwise stressful situations like grooming and going to the vet. Trick training fosters a deeper relationship between the two of you. With more advanced tricks, your cat will learn "cooperative-care" style tricks, where she learns tricks that allow her to be an active participant in vet care or grooming by learning to offer her feet, ears and mouth for examination. These skills are similar to those used with our cats' giant relatives in conservation/zoo environments where big cats like lions and tigers are taught to be active participants in vet care instead of being forced. 🐾



Sassafras Lowrey is a Certified Trick Dog Instructor (CTDI), celebrated author and cat lover. Sassafras lives and writes in Portland, Oregon with her 20-year-old cat, who rules the house, and a 6-year-old cat that she rescued as a kitten from the streets of New York City. Learn more at SassafrasLowrey.com.