

Cats Who Eat Plants

If cats are meat eaters, why does yours sometimes prefer salad? Actually, eating small amounts of plants or grass is normal for cats, and as many as one in three housecats regularly munches on veggies. There are a few common reasons for this behavior.

First, your cat might just be looking for some fun. Leaves that dangle or flap in the breeze can look a lot like a fluttering bird or cat toy, so they can be pretty exciting to a cat who's in a playful mood. Some cats might have learned that biting plants is a sure-fire way to get your attention. Kittens and juveniles might just be looking for something (anything!) to chew, just like human babies, who put everything into their mouths and find comfort chewing on teething rings. Eating large amounts of grass or leaves usually results in vomiting or can act as a laxative. No one knows if cats sometimes purposely eat plants to solve gastrointestinal discomfort or to help bring up hairballs, but those are possibilities. Green plants might also provide some missing nutrients, but there's currently no scientific evidence that plant eating satisfies any nutritional deficiency.

Most of the time, plant eating is just a nuisance to pet parents, but it can be dangerous if a cat decides to eat a toxic plant or a plant that's been treated with pesticides. Many common house and garden plants are poisonous to cats. Please see the ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center's website for a list of [common poisonous plants](#).

Other Problems That Might Cause Your Cat to Eat Plants

Pica

A cat might bite or eat a wide variety of non-food items like string, rubber bands or electrical cords. This behavior is known as "pica." It's dangerous because it can cause intestinal blockages. The recommendations we provide to reduce your cat's houseplant-eating habits can also help resolve pica. Please consult with a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) for additional advice. You can read our article on [Finding Professional Help](#) to locate one of these professionals in your area.

Compulsive Disorder

Cats who seem obsessed with chewing or sucking on non-food items—especially wool, cotton or other fabrics—might have a compulsive disorder. The Eastern breeds, including the Siamese and Burmese, seem particularly prone to this problem. Compulsive behavior can be difficult to interrupt, and a consultation with a Certified Applied Animal Behaviorist (CAAB or ACAAB) or a board-certified veterinary behaviorist (Dip ACVB) might be necessary. Please see our article on [Compulsive Behavior in Cats](#) for more information and [Finding Professional Help](#) to locate a behaviorist in your area.

What to Do About the Problem

To effectively keep your cat from eating houseplants, focus on the following recommendations:

1. Limit access to the plants.
2. Make the plants unappealing.
3. Provide alternative, safe outlets for your cat's behavior.

Limit Access to the Plants

Cat-proof your house by moving forbidden or toxic plants out of reach. Cats, like small children, can't be expected to have very good judgment, so their guardians must ensure their environment is safe. Closing doors, placing plants on top of inaccessible furniture or hanging plants from the ceiling are simple solutions.

Make the Plants Unappealing

Use a deterrent on or around non-toxic plants. One option is coating the leaves with something non-toxic that tastes terrible, such as Grannick's Bitter Apple® or Veterinarian's Best® Bitter Cherry Spray. You can also spray plant leaves with water and then sprinkle them with cayenne pepper. Another possibility is a motion-activated deterrent, such as the SSSCAT® cat repellent device, which emits a short, harmless but startling burst of air when a cat approaches. Odor-based repellents tend to be less effective, and their toxicity must be carefully determined.

Provide Acceptable, Safe Alternatives

Grow pots of herbs or grass specifically for your cat to chew on. Widely available in pet supply stores, these can be grown from seeds or purchased pre-sprouted in pots. Live oat or wheat grass and catnip are very attractive to many cats. Place these plants in easy-to-reach places where your cat spends a lot of time.

Young cats who explore or play by putting things in their mouths can be given pieces of rawhide or dog chew toys. (Rubbing a little meat spread or fish oil on them may spark your cat's interest.) Also try feeding your cat chewy, dry or bulky cat food that requires a lot of chewing. Consider providing food inside interactive feeding toys, like the small-sized Tricky Treat™ Ball, or hiding many small meals around the house. That way, your cat will have to "hunt" for her food, which will keep her busy with an acceptable, fun activity.

What NOT to Do

Do not scold, hit or punish your cat for eating plants. Doing any of these things is ineffective because your cat will simply learn to eat plants when you're not around. She might even become afraid of you or defensively aggressive toward you.