

Keep Your Curious Cat Off The Counter



Ask any cat-parent. Cooking in the kitchen, with your furry companion so dangerously close to so many accidents-waiting-to-happen, is hardly fun.

But how does one keep them from taking a flying-leap onto the counter all the time? Let's attempt to solve this age-old riddle plaguing cat-owners the world over.

But before we do that, let's delve a little bit into kitty psychology and find out why counters fascinate our feline pals so much.

What Makes Counters So Attractive?



Cats are creatures who naturally look for elevated spaces to perch on.

In the wild, the need for elevated spaces is to be able to keep an eye out for prey and predators. Our domesticated pals carry the same instinct and kitchen counters become their natural preference, with the added appeal of all the food that gets cooked (and spilled) there.

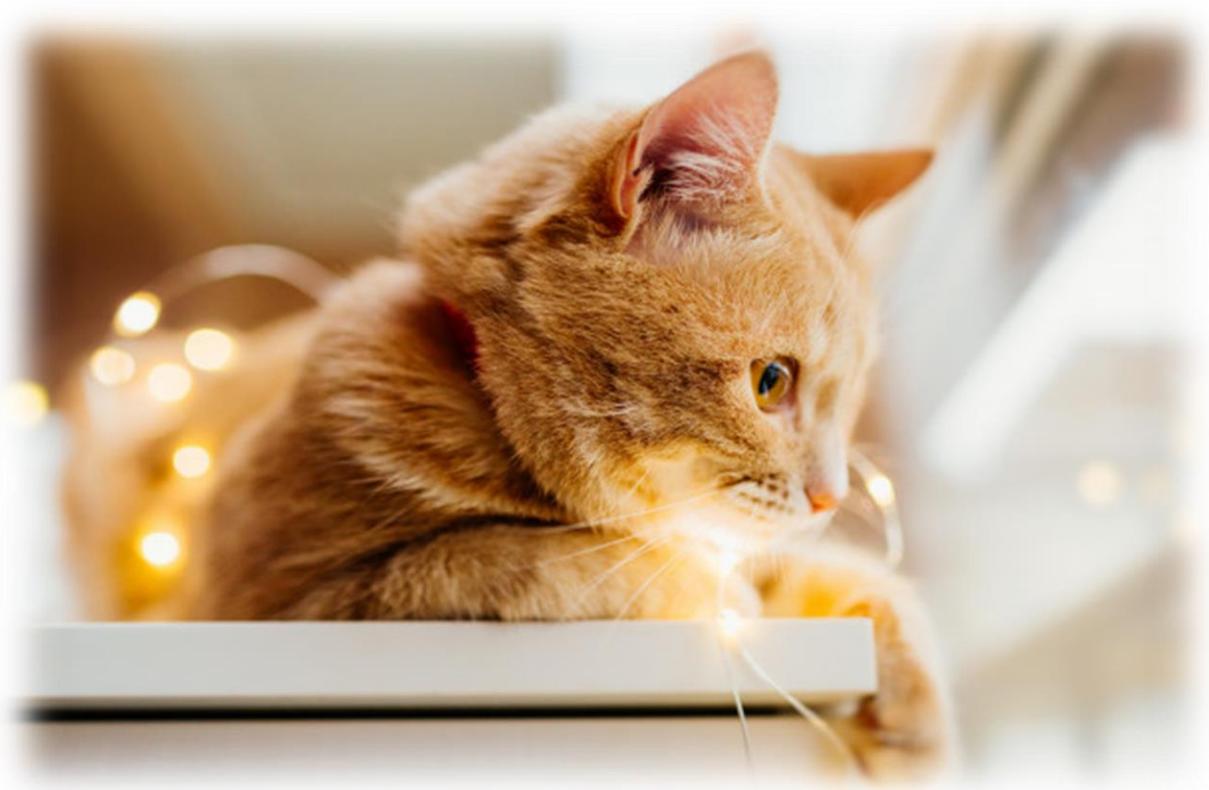
Also, experts say that their bodies are meant for jumping and the large muscles in their hind legs give them just the right amount of spring to leap up and reach elevated spaces and they can do this in a fraction of a second. It's no wonder then, that they're up on the counter with their noses into all kinds of things, before you can finish saying Robinson Crusoe.

They are also extremely curious beings, constantly chasing what's on the other side of the proverbial closed door. There's actually a lot of truth behind the famous saying, 'Curiosity killed the cat'.

Having established why counter tops in the kitchen are such coveted places for them, let's find out how to make them unattractive to our cats.

3 Steps to Stop Counter Cruising

Step 1 Make That Counter Unappealing



The first thing that'll make the kitchen counter unattractive to a cat would be to remove anything that resembles food. This means making sure that all food has been put away in the refrigerator or cupboards and the dishes have been cleaned. Care needs to be taken to ensure

that the drain is clear too, as cats may enjoy small food portions left there.

Some cats have a liking for running water and that makes the kitchen counter a fun place to be. Make sure your taps aren't leaky and too easy-to-manuever for your kitty. A good idea would be to get your water-loving kitty a feline fountain of her own to play with.

Apart from removing temptations from the counter what also needs to be done is, to make climbing up on the counter unpleasant for the cat, without punishing her in any way of course.

Some people believe in using remote punishing devices like squirt guns or shake-cans full of beans or pennies, but it may be a bad idea to use punishment as a deterrent. That's because it may frighten your cat, which you don't want to do. Also, your cat may not respond well to the punishment, as it may not make the connection between the punishment and the behavior.

Also, using punishments like loud noises are a bad idea because, if you have a multi-cat household, the noise meant for one cat may startle another cat, in another part of the house, doing something appropriate, like using the litter-box. Also, verbal punishments like yelling or scolding, may stress your cat out and may cause behavior issues like aggression and may even start impacting your relationship with your cat.

What works well as a deterrent, are cheap plastic mats covered with sticky tape on one side and placing these all over the counter when the kitchen is not in use. The sticky mats can also be replaced with aluminum foils that can be held in place with sticky tape. Cats don't like the unpleasant feeling of sticky tape under their paws and the rustling noise that aluminum foils make when paws land on them. The idea here is to give them a painless and mildly uncomfortable sensation so

as to discourage the behavior. Your complete absence from the scene also ensures that they don't associate you with the unpleasant feeling.

These sticky mats need to be left on the counter at all times when the kitchen is not in use. After a couple of weeks without any attempt at counter surfing by your kitty, you can try removing these, one at a time, until the counter is clear. If the habit returns, simply rinse and repeat. The mats can also be sprinkled with cayenne pepper or smeared with a small portion of Vicks Vapor Rub (just watch to ensure that your cats don't lick it, as that could harm them)

Citrus peels also work well as deterrents, as cats don't like their smell and avoid going near them. But they become ineffective soon when they dry and there are only so many oranges that one can eat in a household!

Whatever the reason behind your cat's cruising habit, observing what it does on the counter will give you a cue about what she's interested in. Just removing what it's after, should stop her from leaping up sooner or later.

Step 2 Distract Her When She's Ready to Make The Leap



Every time you spot your cat poised to jump onto the counter, distract her. You can throw a treat or toy in the other direction or call her to you. And when she responds and comes to you, give her a treat and reward her for the good behavior. This way, you're encouraging a good behavior while distracting her from bad behavior at the same time.

Step 3 Give her Other Attractive Options



Besides the food on the counter (which we have taken care of), two main reasons cats want to be on that counter are – the height of the counter, which appeals to their feline love of elevated spaces, and the proximity to you.

Before trying to deter your kitty from hoisting herself onto the counter, you will need to ensure that you give her other options, which fulfil these two needs. Placing a cat tree or a bar stool in the kitchen, away from the counter might be a good idea. The cat gets to see what you're doing from a sufficiently high spot. And when it starts to use this spot, do not forget to reward this good behavior to reinforce it.

Other options can be, having shelves made around the house which give your cat enough elevated spaces to explore, away from harm's way.

Also, buying a food-dispensing toy and filling it up with her favorite treat may help keep your cat busy and give her enough challenge to keep her feeling stimulated.

What will also help is ensuring that you play with your cat at least once a day. This ensures that your kitty is happily exhausted and has had the pleasure of your attention and will not go seeking it when you're busy in the kitchen.

If your cat simply won't stay off the counter, when you are cooking and you are really worried for her safety, try confining her safely in a cat-proofed room ensuring that she has access to water, her toys and the litter box, during cooking and mealtimes. And bring her back in, once you're done.

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