

## 7 Cat-Friendly Herbs That Can Help Treat Ailments

It's like creating an apothecary garden for your cat. All you need is a small, sunny spot and you can grow any or all of these cat-pleasing and health-supporting herbs. Help relieve itching, boost digestion and soothe arthritic discomfort with these easy-to-grow herbs.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Managing stress in cats requires a comprehensive approach, but a variety of calming herbs and supplements are available for support
- When synthetic feline facial pheromone spray was used in a veterinary clinic, cats had significantly fewer vocalizations, suggesting stress reduction
- Cat-specific flower essences can support your cat's emotional health
- L-theanine, an amino acid found in green tea, may help to relieve stress and anxiety by increasing brain levels of serotonin, dopamine and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA)
- Ashwagandha, hops, valerian, rhodiola, chamomile, tulsi and skullcap are additional calming herbs that may benefit cats; always consult an integrative veterinarian for proper dosage

Cats are sensitive creatures that can get stressed or anxious due to many environmental factors. A new addition to your family, trips to the veterinarian, thunderstorms and even something as innocent as rearranging your furniture may cause your kitty to feel uneasy. Some signs of cat stress, such as running and hiding or aggression, are obvious, but others are very subtle.

A stressed-out cat may sleep more than usual or seem uninterested in play. Litterbox issues can also result, so tending to anxiety and stress is not only important for your cat's well-being — it can keep harmony in your household as well.

Managing stress in cats requires a comprehensive approach, one that addresses the **anxiety-inducing triggers**. However, when you need some extra help, a variety of calming herbs and supplements are available.

### Pheromones and Other Stress-Relieving Scents

Pheromones are invisible chemicals released by animals that affect the behavior of other animals in the species. These species-specific chemicals deliver messages, acting as a communication tool among members of the same species. Pheromones can also help to tension.

One study involved two pheromone products — Feliway Friends™ (for cats) and Adaptil™ (for dogs), which emit calming species-specific pheromones — in multispecies homes over a six-week period.

The pheromones led to notable improvements.<sup>1</sup> According to the study authors, “Pheromone-related products are believed to affect the emotional processing of animals that can detect them and are in widespread use as environmental adjuncts to aid in behavioral problems associated with stress and the perception of a stressful environment ... In conclusion, both products appear to improve the cat-dog relationship ...”<sup>2</sup>

A similar study was conducting using Feliway Friends in households with two to five cats that were exhibiting aggression for at least two weeks. Use of the pheromones decreased the frequency and intensity of aggressive interactions over a seven-week period.<sup>3</sup> Further, when synthetic feline facial pheromone spray was used in a veterinary clinic, cats had significantly fewer vocalizations, suggesting stress reduction.<sup>4</sup>

Cats are very sensitive to scents, and flower essences can be another delicate but noticeable way to support your cat’s emotional health. There are cat-specific remedies, as well as blends for certain stressors that can be calming to your cat, or essential oil blends that can be water diffused specifically for cats. Additional calming scents for cats include:<sup>5</sup>

- Lavender essential oils in your home — water-diffusing a few drops of high-quality lavender essential oil in your home may calm your kitty, but be aware that cats are sensitive to essential oils, so always offer cats the choice to leave the room with a diffuser and never apply them directly to your cat without expert advice.
- Catnip may cause some kitties to become hyper, but the *Nepeta* plant species from which it comes may have some sedative effects.<sup>6</sup> The cats that don’t respond to catnip often enjoy silvagine instead, so offer both to see how your cat responds.

## Calming Herbs and Supplements

Talk to your holistic veterinarian about calming herbs and nutraceuticals that may help soothe your anxious cat. Several to consider include:<sup>7</sup>

- **L-theanine** — This amino acid found in green tea can help to relieve stress and anxiety. It works by increasing brain levels of serotonin, dopamine and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA).
- **Calming milk protein** — Alpha-caseozepine is a type of milk protein that promotes sleep and has anxiety-relieving effects.<sup>8</sup>
- **Ashwagandha** — This adaptogenic herb is widely used in Ayurvedic medicine to reduce stress and enhance well-being in humans. Although studies on its use in cats are scarce, a study in dogs found ashwagandha reduced urine cortisol-to-creatinine ratio and signs of fear and anxiety in stressed dogs.<sup>9</sup>
- **Melatonin** — Cats produce melatonin naturally, just like humans. In addition to promoting restful sleep, melatonin has anxiety-reducing effects.<sup>10</sup> Use animal products.
- **Chamomile** — Enjoyed by humans as a soothing tea before bed, chamomile may also have anxiety-relieving effects in your cat. Research supports chamomile’s antidepressant and anxiety-reducing potential.<sup>11</sup>
- **Hops** — Most known for their use as an ingredient in beer, hops have a sedative effect and increase the activity of GABA, which quiets central nervous system activity.<sup>12</sup>
- **Skullcap** — This traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) plant is a calming herb that has continued to receive praise for its stress- and anxiety-relieving effects.<sup>13</sup> Use animal products.
- **Valerian** — Widely used for promoting sleep and anxiety relief in humans, valerian may help address anxiety by altering brain connectivity.<sup>14</sup> Use animal products.

- **Holy basil (tulsi)** — Another adaptogenic herb used in Ayurveda, tulsi is known to counter psychological and emotional stress.<sup>15</sup>
- **Rhodiola** — Rhodiola is a perennial plant traditionally used for stress support, to help the body resist the effects of stress.

When addressing your cat's stress, it's essential to also think about your own, as the two go hand-in-hand. Your cat will pick up on your anxiety, which is why the calmer you are, the calmer your cat will be.

If your cat's anxiety is severe or not improving, seeking the help of a **behaviorist** can help you solve more complex behavioral problems. And always schedule a visit with your veterinarian to rule out any underlying health conditions and determine the right supplement doses and custom protocol for your animal's specific needs.

## Sources and References

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<sup>10</sup> [Int J Mol Sci. 2022 Dec 19;23\(24\):16187. doi: 10.3390/ijms232416187](#)

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<sup>12</sup> [Acta Physiol Hung. 2012 Jun;99\(2\):133-9. doi: 10.1556/APhysiol.99.2012.2.6](#)

<sup>13</sup> [American Botanical Council, HerbalGram. 2012, Issues 93, Page: 34-41](#)

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<sup>15</sup> [J Ayurveda Integr Med. 2014 Oct-Dec; 5\(4\): 251-259](#)

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