

Is This the Secret to a Healthier, Happier Cat?

Explore how a mini herb garden can provide amazing health benefits for your cat. Even non-gardeners can do it! Enhance your kitty's life with these powerful, natural remedies that are easy to grow and maintain.

Reviewed by Dr. Becker

STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- If you're a cat parent, have you thought about growing a few feline-friendly, health-enhancing herbs?
- Catnip is an obvious choice, along with cat thyme, cat's claw, and other easy-to-grow kitty safe herbs
- You might also consider sprouting sunflower seeds to give your cat a healthy, nutrient-rich alternative to cat grass
- Sprouts are also rich in enzymes, making them almost pre-digested, similar to plant matter that wild cats ingest from the stomach contents and digestive tracts of prey animals
- Goldenseal can be used as a natural wound disinfectant for cats, and it may also soothe allergies

Editor's Note: This article is a reprint. It was originally published June 15, 2024.

If you have feline family members and you also have a green thumb, have you considered growing a cat-friendly herb garden? Certain herbs can provide health benefits for your pet, and others can be used to treat specific feline ailments.

Actually, cat parents without a green thumb or space for a garden might also want to consider this idea, since herbs are quite easy to grow, and an herb garden takes up very little space. All you really need is a sunny spot on a balcony, patio, or windowsill.

7 Cat-Friendly Herbs

1. **Cat thyme** — Cat thyme, *Teucrium marum*, is not actually thyme at all, but a germander. It's a mounding, tender perennial with grey-green leaves tipped by pink flowers that bloom in the summer. Cat thyme has a similar effect to catnip on susceptible kitties. One downside is this herb has a musty odor that most humans find unpleasant, though cats are attracted to it.

If you grow cat thyme outdoors, you may find free-roaming cats nibbling it right out of your garden. If you grow it indoors, you'll probably notice it's a favorite with your own kitty.

2. **Cat's claw and dandelion root** — A solution of dandelion root and cat's claw can help relieve itching in cats with allergies. In addition, dandelion root promotes healthy digestion and liver detoxification, while cat's claw helps modulate the immune system.

How to prepare the itch-relieving solution: Harvest a batch of pesticide-free dandelion roots, rinse them well,

chop into 1/4 inch pieces, place on roasting pan and dry in the oven for 2 hours at 250 degrees, occasionally flipping them to make sure they're evenly dried. Once they're dried out, finely chop (or pulse in a coffee grinder to mince). Store in an airtight container.

The outer parts of the stems (bark) of the cat's claw plant are used for making tea. Harvest a 10-inch section of plant, strip the outer layer of material off the stalk, chop, dry and mince just as you did the dandelion roots.

When you're ready to make tea, steep 1 tablespoon of each herb in a cup of water for 20 minutes. Let cool. Mix a tablespoon of prepared tea with two tablespoons of bone or chicken broth (to increase palatability) and offer it to your cats or add it to their food.

You can also apply cooled tea topically on itchy spots. Dab it on kitty's itchy skin 3 to 4 times daily. Store unused in the refrigerator and discard after 48 hours.

3. **Catnip — Catnip** is a perennial herb belonging to the mint family *Nepeta cataria*. It's the chemical nepetalactone in catnip that triggers a euphoric response in the brains of susceptible cats. If your kitty happens to be a catnip non-responder, consider offering him silver vine or Tatarian honeysuckle instead.

Fortunately, catnip is neither harmful nor addictive for felines, and most responsive kitties absolutely love it. Your cat's reaction will depend on whether he sniffs or eats the herb. Sniffing produces a stimulant effect, while ingesting catnip has a sedative effect.

For cats with itchy skin, a catnip tea bath can be soothing. Steep a cup of fresh leaves in a quart of boiling water, allow the water to cool completely, and strain off the leaves. Pour the cool tea over the kitty (not her head), massage in and towel dry.

4. **Valerian** — Valerian is an herb native to Europe and parts of Asia that also grows in North America. It's most commonly used as a natural sleep aid for people with insomnia.

In susceptible cats, valerian's effect is similar to catnip. It works as both a natural stimulant (which can be helpful for sedentary kitties who need to be more physically active), and an olfactory stress buster.

5. **Peppermint, chamomile, and rosemary** — The oils from these herbs have soothing properties for a cat's itchy skin and also act as natural pest repellents. You can make an herbal dip using one, two or all three of these herbs together.

Pour 1-quart boiling water over 2 cups packed fresh peppermint and/or chamomile and/or rosemary and allow it to steep for 30 minutes. Strain the liquid and dilute with 4 quarts of warm water. Saturate your cat's coat thoroughly from the neck to the tail (avoid head) with the dilution and allow it to air dry.

Important! Do NOT use essential oils in place of real herbs in this recipe!

6. **Licorice root** — Not only do many cats like the taste of licorice, but this herb can be used as a natural remedy to soothe allergies, endocrine and digestive issues, and respiratory problems. Licorice root's anti-inflammatory properties can also be helpful for arthritic kitties, and it also supports liver detoxification.
7. **Goldenseal** — Goldenseal can be used as a natural wound disinfectant for cats, and it may also soothe allergies. All parts of the plant can be used medicinally, but it's the roots that are most commonly used for teas and poultices.

Goldenseal roots can be harvested, dried and minced, and made into a tea (same instructions as the dandelion root tea, above). The cooled tea is excellent as a topical wound cleanser. It can also be dabbed on itchy, inflamed skin and is safe for use around the eyes.

A Healthier Alternative to Cat Grass

If your kitty likes to nibble on cat grass now and then, consider growing your own sunflower sprouts. Sprouts can provide a very easy and inexpensive source of fresh, live organic vegetation for your cat.

Seeds are the first life stage of a plant, and sprouts are the second stage. They are the tiny stems of the plants that emerge from wet seeds before they put down roots and become full-grown plants. After a few days of germinating, these little plants are packed with a ton of nutrients.

In fact, pound for pound, many sprouts contain significantly more digestible vitamins, minerals, and proteins than the adult versions of the same plants. Sprouts are also rich in enzymes, making them almost pre-digested, similar to plant matter that wild cats ingest from the stomach contents and digestive tracts of prey animals.

In addition to their nutritional benefits, sunflower sprouts are also the ultimate in homegrown foods. When you grow them yourself using organic seeds, you can be sure you're not exposing your cat to harmful pesticides or other chemicals.

Sunflower sprouts are also among the least expensive foods you can buy or grow for kitty to nibble on. Interestingly, if we don't provide living foods for our cats to eat, they often end up snacking on our houseplants. Since many kitties also tend to immediately throw up after nibbling a houseplant, and because some houseplants are toxic, sprouts are a really safe and healthy alternative.

If you grow them yourself, you can cut the cost by about 90% or more compared to buying them.
