

Esmé went crazy for her new toy!



CLARE HEMINGTON DipCAPBT is an accredited cat behaviourist, a member of the COAPE Association of Pet Behaviourists and Trainers, and certified animal behaviourist for the International Companion Animal Network (ICAN). She has a cat behaviour referrals practice in Kent, from which she also runs her Honeysuckle Cat Toys business from, with the help of her Siamese, Billy.

THE NEW TOY IN TOWN

Looking for a new way to keep your kitty entertained? Behaviourist Clare Hemington fills us in on the latest natural cat toy.

Have you ever found yourself excited about giving your cat a new toy, eagerly hoping for a playful display of gratitude, only to watch while he shuns the toy in favour of the cardboard box it came in? I'm sure most cat owners have experienced this — I certainly have!

The frustrating truth is that, when it comes to toys, cats have very individual preferences and it can take trial and error, not to mention expense, to find a toy that's just right for them. One owner I know has a cat who only plays with a particular item of ladies' sanitary wear. Make of that what you will.

However, there's now a new cat toy in town. It's not flashy or expensive, but a very humble and completely natural offering which has cats literally drooling over it. It's a simple, but very fragrant, piece of wood. Not any old

wood, but wood from the Tatarian honeysuckle shrub.

As a cat behaviourist, I'm always on the lookout for new ways to spice up the lives of our felines, and am particularly keen on toys like catnip that appeal to a cat's amazing sense of smell. However, I know that not all cats are catnip fans, including my cat, Billy, and it was while



Getting stuck in.

trying to find alternatives to catnip that I came across a new piece of research highlighting the effectiveness of Tatarian honeysuckle as a form of cat enrichment. Like a cat, my curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to find out more about it.

Also known by the Latin name *Lonicera Tatarica*, Tatarian honeysuckle is a species of honeysuckle that is native to central Asia and parts of Russia, although it's

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Did you know?

Tatarian honeysuckle is not native to the UK, so you won't find it growing in your garden.

who enjoy catnip. However, whether a cat likes catnip or not is something that is genetically determined, which is why one in three don't respond to it. This makes

Tatarian honeysuckle wood a great alternative not only for these cats but for all others from the youngest to the most senior.

Anxious cats, in particular, may find their stress levels reduced by some uninhibited play with Tatarian honeysuckle wood. It might even help in specific situations, such as taking your cat to the vet and providing enrichment for cats in rescue.

Despite it being available in Canada and the United States for over 25 years, where tens of thousands of pieces of the wood have been sold as cat toys, very few cat owners in the UK seem to have heard of Tatarian honeysuckle. However, witnessing the wonderful response that this simple toy elicited from the cats in my trial group gave me the confidence and desire to not only increase awareness of it among cat owners over here, but give as many cats as possible the opportunity to get their paws on it.

So, it was with much excitement that, in June this year, I launched Honeysuckle Cat Toys — a small online shop selling pieces of Tatarian honeysuckle wood, as well as other toys made from ground honeysuckle wood. It is currently the only place in the UK where the wood is available to buy.

While the *Lonicera Tatarica* species of honeysuckle wood is considered safe and not toxic or addictive for cats and humans, other species of honeysuckle, including those in the *Lonicera* family, shouldn't be offered as toys for cats.

Tatarian honeysuckle wood makes a wonderful, natural toy for cats and the great thing about it is that it can be enhanced and refreshed. For those cats who like a stronger scent, wetting the wood will intensify its fragrance, and sanding it to remove the top layer of sawdust when it starts to look a bit jaded will bring it back to life!

This means that giving your cat a piece of Tatarian honeysuckle wood should keep him satisfied for much longer than he would be with a cardboard box.

Tatarian honeysuckle wood cat toys are available to buy now from www.honeysucklecattoys.co.uk



Tatarian honeysuckle grows as a dense shrub with pink flowers.

probably better known in Canada and the United States where it was introduced as an ornamental plant during the 1700s. It grows as a dense and twiggly shrub with blue-green leaves and small white, pink, or rose-red blossoms. While there are several different species of honeysuckle, it's only the wood from the *Lonicera Tatarica* species that cats respond to.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

With my research done, I decided to test it out on the many cats of my acquaintance. I found and imported some good-quality slices of Tatarian honeysuckle wood and began my trial. The results were fascinating. Without exception, all the cats I offered it to responded in very positive ways. As soon as they smelled its aroma, they couldn't help but lick it, drool on it, hug it, rub it on their chins and cheeks, roll with it, and rabbit-kick it with their back legs.

These are all behaviours seen by cats

Tried & Tested

Office cats Esmé and Tommy put these new toys to the test! Here's their verdict (words by their cat mum, Amber).

“I had never heard of Tatarian honeysuckle wood for cats before, so when it was suggested that I try it with my cats, I jumped at the chance. I was looking forward to using it with my five-month-old kittens, Tommy and Esmé.

“I wasn't sure what to expect and how the kittens would react. The kittens seemed a bit confused by their new toy at first, but, once they had both had a sniff, they were immediately intrigued.

“Tommy is quite a boisterous character, whereas Esmé is more reserved. As expected, Tommy bit, bunny-kicked, and threw the wood around the room, bringing out his playful nature even more.

“Esmé was a bit more cautious to begin with, but once she had seen her brother playing, she decided to get involved. Esmé went crazy for it — rolling around, purring, and chewing the wood; it really brought her out of her shell.

“Their reactions after playing with the wood differed. Tommy had a burst of energy, attempting to wrestle with his sister, who was having none of it! While Esmé was much more mellow, pleasantly sleepy, and happy to cuddle up on my lap.

“It was great to see such a strong response from the kittens. Honeysuckle wood is definitely something that I will introduce more to the kittens as they grow.”



Tommy.