

# Catnip & Your Cat

Catnip isn't just a cat thing. Actually catnip is a nickname for a plant that comes from the mint family. For a cat, this herb is like one too many martinis. The reaction may be wild and crazy or totally oblivious in that classic "who cares" manner that cats do so well.

Inside this plant is a chemical element called nepetalactone, which seems to prompt amazing reactions that are different for each cat. While you can't smell it, this herbal plant has a unique scent to a feline. The typical cat pauses to sniff this unusual substance and maybe give it a small lick. Then the cat returns to chew on the plant's leaves. Some cats love to roll around in it and get it all over their fur.

Shortly after ingesting catnip, a cat may leap, roll, wiggle or purr and seem to freak out. The cat may even become aggressive toward another pet when under the influence of this hypnotic plant. Another cat may nibble the catnip, grin broadly and quietly savor the experience. Fortunately, this "trip" lasts just a matter of minutes, although coming down from the high may take a few hours before your cat responds normally. Older cats seem less vulnerable or

perhaps less interested in the whole experience. Very young kittens also are less interested in the plant.

This herbal plant can be purchased in a pet store in dried leaf form or as an essential oil. Just a small drop of the oil is all that's needed to get a reaction. You can also purchase catnip-scented toys. But keep in mind that the potency of the herb declines quickly over time. So you want purchase well-sealed cat toys, or even vacuum-packaged, for the best freshness. Toss out old toys regularly and get fresh toys so your cat gets the same enjoyment out of them. While catnip is related to other common plants like basil, spearmint and oregano, those plants don't have the same effect on cats.

Catnip is an aphrodisiac for some cats, causing them to become very amorous with another cat. So you have to wonder, can a cat become addicted to it? While each catnip nibble is a delight for your cat, he's not going to trash the house or sell your car to get more. Since cats won't become addicted to catnip, it's a treat you can provide for your feline friend a few times a week. If you have more than one cat, give them each its own little pile of the herb so that they don't have to compete for the pleasure against one another.

