

Cat's Ask has a fresh scoop on kitty litter

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Halifax business's creation offers safflower seeds, two-tier system



Mark Fenwick holds his cat Boo Boo behind his litter box prototype, The Cat's Ask, which uses bird seed to banish smells. Fenwick is crowdfunding on Kickstarter for his new business venture. (RYAN TAPLIN / Staff)

Some cat lovers will be purring over an odourless kitty litter venture from a new Halifax business.

"We have four rescue cats at our home, and you can walk right up to a litter box and cannot smell a thing," Mark Fenwick, founder of **Catchwise Inc.**, said Thursday in an interview.

The arrival of the rescue cats about three years ago prompted Fenwick's wife, Bernice, to push her husband to devise a better solution than the traditional sort of litter box.

Their home with four litter boxes was filled with the ammonia smell that is all too familiar to some cat owners who use traditional kitty litter.

"We never thought we'd ever have four rescue cats, but it happened, and we found traditional litter boxes were an unsatisfactory solution," Fenwick said.

"Sheer desperation is behind the invention."

Simple bird seed is the key ingredient, along with a locally sourced litter bin and cover, with a waxed cardboard waterproof base.

The plan is to raise at least \$65,000 through a 30-day campaign on Kickstarter, a social media venue that provides a forum for fundraising for small-business startups. Investors typically get first access to products.

A starter kit is available for a minimum investment of \$140. Details are available at [kickstarter.com/projects/thecatsask/the-cats-ask](https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/thecatsask/the-cats-ask) (<https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/thecatsask/the-cats-ask>).

The two-tiered Cat's Ask litter box replaces traditional cat litter with safflower seeds, usually sold as bird seed.

"The design allows liquid waste to filter through a grate and into a hidden collector, and then is later flushed. Poop is scooped and also flushed," the company said in a news release.

Cat people with septic systems are advised to discard solid waste in the compost bin.

"Seeds are spritzed with vinegar and water and stay fresh and clean for a month, even with multiple cats," the release said.

"Meanwhile, the used seeds are eco-friendly enough for the compost bin, which means that all the litter waste is either flushed or composted resulting in zero garbage."

Some local cat owners were enlisted to test the box, which funnels pee through the safflower seed bed and into a container below, which can be replaced with standard milk or juice cartons.

The safflower seed litter is replaced once a month and is available from pet stores or online through the Cat's Ask Express Litter Service. Visit thecatsask.com for some visuals.

Fenwick said initial Kickstarter supporters will have the odour-free kitty bin prototypes in their homes shortly after the fundraising campaign.

After a couple days, the company achieved over seven per cent of its fundraising target.

The plan is to manufacture the litter bins locally and to distribute across Canada and the United States.

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