

Catnip

Catnip is the popular name for a perennial herb of the **mint** family, called **NAPETA CATARIA**. It has a chemical within the stem and leaves called **NEPETALACTONE**, this is an unsaturated lactone which does for some cats what marijuana does for some people, but without any side effects or addictive tendencies. Catnip can cause an amazing reaction! The cat will rub it, roll over it, kick at it, and generally go nuts for several minutes. Then the cat will lose interest and walk away. Two hours later, the cat may come back and have exactly the same response. Although no one knows exactly what happens in the cat's brain, it is known that the chemical **nepetalactone** in catnip is the thing that triggers the response. Apparently, it somehow kicks off a stereotypical pattern in cats that are sensitive to the chemical. Large cats like tigers can be sensitive to it as well. Because there really isn't any **scent** that causes this sort of reaction in humans, catnip is hard for us to understand. However, it is not an uncommon behaviour in animals that rely heavily on their noses. The catnip reaction is inherited, and some cats can be totally unaffected by it.

Catnip was originally native to Europe and Asia. Over 2000 years ago Romans used it for cooking and healing. During the Middle Ages, catnip was used for the treatment of nervousness, colds, and gastrointestinal complaints. Just how did cats become acquainted with it? Some theorize that the Egyptians, known for their worship of cats, were probably the first to offer catnip to their cats.

Catnip is not the only plant to have this effect on felines. **VALERIAN** is another one, plus plants that contain **ACTINIDINE**. Catnip is used in both its dried and fresh forms in numerous cat toys, adding an extra dimension of fun to playtime, and extra entertainment for onlookers.

Protect your pet with knowledge

Julie Pickering

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