

Supporting Natural Behaviors in Primates



Environmental enrichment goes beyond toys and treats—it is everything that supports the natural behaviors of your primate species.



Knowing how your primate species behaves in the wild is key to understanding what activities are enriching for the primates in your care. Consider, for example, how each species moves through its environment: Does it stay in the trees? Spend time on the ground? Brachiate (use its arms to swing)? Or cling to vertical surfaces?

By designing your enrichment plan around **the natural behaviors that are being supported** and **how they are being supported**, you will be able to see if you are offering a proper range of activities to promote psychological well-being.



COMMON WAYS TO SUPPORT NATURAL BEHAVIORS



NATURAL BEHAVIORS	YOU CAN OFFER...
Many species spend time in trees	elevated resting areas in the main enclosure that are appropriate for the species
Some prefer to rest or sleep in hollow spaces	nest boxes or similar structures
Some engage in scent-marking	suitable scent-retaining surfaces, like wood or rope
Most species like variety: exploring, playing, and problem-solving	Items that can be picked up, played with, and then replaced when needed – anything that keeps them busy and allows safe exploration



DID YOU KNOW?

“Working” for food is one of the most common natural behaviors for primates. Keeping them occupied with opportunities to forage is a great way to promote psychological well-being. Some ways to do this include:

- offering whole fruits or vegetables that require extra work to access the edible parts
- changing the way the standard diet is fed so primates need to either search their enclosure to find the food or manipulate the food through or around obstacles (like enclosure mesh)
- providing treats in puzzle feeders
- scattering food in different substrates, like bedding, straw, grass (real or artificial), or leaf litter

This Animal Care Aid is part of a series developed to help with promoting psychological well-being in primates. Topics covered in the series include social grouping, supporting species-typical activities, and special considerations.

Questions? Email us at CenterforAnimalWelfare@usda.gov

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