

Cat: Indoor vs. Outdoor



Indoor cats and outdoor cats encounter different challenges and risks. An indoor cat might suffer from boredom and medical issues such as obesity leading to stress, behavior problems, and early death; the outdoor cat is at higher risk for diseases, injuries, and getting lost. Whatever you and your cat's choice is, it is important to maintain good welfare for both options.

Making the Outdoors Safe

- Talk to your veterinarian and maintain and update all vaccines needed for an outdoor cat, regular flea and heartworm prevention, and regular de-worming.
- Make sure your cat is neutered or spayed and micro-chipped.
- Make sure the immediate outdoors are safe for roaming cats. If your backyard has a fence around it, consider installing the "Cat Fence." This netting system prevents your cat from leaving the yard, so you know where she is at all times. It can also be used to keep other cats out of your yard.
- Build an enclosure outside. This allows your cat to have an outdoor experience while remaining safe. Check cat magazines for ideas and plans.
- If you have a younger cat, train her to accept a leash and harness. This way, you can take the cat on monitored outdoor excursions. See the leash training handout for more details.
- Never tie your cat outside or inside.

Making the Indoors Attractive

- Offer plenty of play and environmental enrichment.
- Talk to your veterinarian about an appropriate diet and caloric intake.
- Put screens on your windows and get a kitty window seat.
- Play with your cat more. Get her running around, chasing a string or other toys several times a day. See handout on how to play with your cat. A little catnip makes it even more fun!
- Add vertical space to the cat's territory. Cat trees, cat condos, shelves, and other climbing apparatuses give your cat more places to climb, play, and call her own.
- Provide scratching posts. Try posts made of different materials—corrugated cardboard, wood, carpet, or sisal rope. You can get freestanding scratching posts, floor level, or door hanging varieties. See handout on using scratching posts.
- Play videos. Many cats enjoy watching videos of cats, birds, fish, insects, and nature scenes. Check your local pet supply and video stores.
- Grow kitty grass. Available at many pet supply stores, it is safe and tasty for your cat to nibble.
- Make your cat "work for food" and use food dispensing and puzzle toys.
- If your cat is an "only child", consider adopting another to keep her company.
- Have at least one more litter box than cats and place them in areas your cat has easy access.
- Not every cat is an indoor only cat.

Remember: even indoor cats should be regularly vaccinated, receive flea prevention, and be micro-chipped. We recommend that all cats wear breakaway collars with up-to-date contact information for their guardians. In an earthquake, fire, burglary, or other mishap, a cat can easily become lost outside, and identification is her best bet for getting home.