



## How to Bring an Outside Cat Indoors

You may think that cats have to go outside to be happy. Cats would disagree with you (and so would local birds!)

Actually, close to two-thirds of owned cats live indoors either exclusively or for a majority of the time. Cats can live a happy and healthy life indoors with their families.

Allowing your cats to roam outdoors can significantly shorten their lives. Potentially deadly dangers—parasites, catching diseases from other cats, being hit by cars, stolen by strangers, attacked by predators, or just plain getting lost—are constant threats to an outdoor cat. And cats themselves can be deadly to local wildlife.

So how do you keep kitty both safe and happy inside?

### **Believe you (and your cat) can do it**

Millions of cats spend their entire lives indoors without complaint. They've never been outside and have no desire to venture out. In fact, many become frightened if they accidentally wander out the door.

"But my cat has always gone outside," you protest. "I can't keep them in now."

That's not necessarily true. Plenty of stray cats have been adopted and turned into happy indoor kitties who don't want to go out. The trick is to make the great indoors as fun and intriguing as the outdoors.

### **Move your cat indoors slowly**

Make the change from outdoors to indoors gradually, until the new way of life becomes old hat. Many cats will adjust with little effort, while others will be miserable—and let you know it. They might scratch at doors, claw at windows, yowl, and try to dash through open doors. So be prepared:

- If your cat has never used a scratching post or a litter box, introduce both items well before transitioning your cat to life inside.
- Feed your cat indoors. Instead of letting your cat back outside as soon as they're finished eating, keep them inside for increasing periods of time.

- If you're starting your cat's retraining during the winter, a warm, dry bed to snuggle in may be just the ticket to convince them to stay inside.
- If they try to make a break for the door, rattle a jar of pennies or give them a squirt with a water gun.
- Never hit, kick, or yell at them; they'll become afraid of you.
- You can train them to run away from an open door by throwing a treat to the other side of the room.

## **Make life inside fun for your cat**

Though people domesticated cats several thousand years ago, they still retain many behaviors of their wild ancestors. Give your kitty plenty of indoors options to express their natural behaviors.

- A cat's play is all based on the hunting instinct, so give them plenty of toys to stalk, chase, pounce on, and kill. They don't have to be fancy; a ball of aluminum foil and a paper bag delight many a cat.
- Cats like to observe their world from above (which is why they climb trees and roofs), so give or make yours a cat tree or kitty jungle gym to climb.
- Give them a sunny window so they can watch the birds or bask in a sunbeam. Make sure the screen is very secure before opening the window.
- Grow cat grass (available at pet supply stores) for them to chew on.
- Give them lots of your time and attention.

You can also try a couple of safe ways for your cat to enjoy the outdoors:

- If your cat is agreeable, train them to walk on a cat harness and leash and take them for a stroll. Don't let them get too far from you where they could encounter something dangerous.
- Think about building a screened-in enclosure attached (otherwise known as a "catio") to the house where your cat can pretend they're an outdoor kitty.

## **Recognize when it's time for your cat to go cold turkey**

If you're having trouble slowly transitioning your cat to a happy life indoors, it may be better to go "cold turkey." Letting your cat outdoors occasionally may only reinforce their pestering behaviors, so keep them indoors all the time.

Do your best not to give in to their requests to go out, and distract their attention with play. Your veterinarian may also prescribe a short course of anti-anxiety medication or homeopathic therapy to help your cat through the transition period.

## **Be proud that you're protecting wildlife**

If you're still on the fence about keeping your cat inside, consider the welfare of your neighborhood wildlife.

A cat's hunting instinct is just that—an instinct. Even well-fed pet cats who are allowed to roam outdoors may attempt to prey on smaller animals, with varying levels of success.

Outdoor cats can have an impact on wildlife populations, especially when threatened and endangered species are concerned. Ground-nesting birds like quail or baby birds (particularly fledglings who have not yet learned to fly) are particularly vulnerable. Even if your cat doesn't stay indoors year-round, keeping them inside during dawn and dusk hours—and during the spring months, when wildlife and their babies are most active—can be helpful.

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## **About Napa Humane**

The Humane Society of Napa County and SPCA, known as Napa Humane, is a non-profit organization incorporated in 1973. Recognizing that companion animals are an important part of healthy communities, we've grown to consider Napa Humane a community service organization. Our programs and services are designed to address the needs of animals – and also to provide support, education, and assistance for all the people who care for and about them.

Napa Humane is a private and independent organization that is supported by private donations by individuals and businesses, bequests, and fees for service. We receive no government funding, tax dollars or funding from national animal welfare organizations.

### **Our Mission**

To promote the welfare of companion animals through protection, advocacy, education, and by example.