

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OUTDOOR CAT A HAPPY INDOOR CAT

Although it takes patience, an outdoor cat can become a perfectly content indoor pet. Some people make the transition from outdoors to indoors gradually, bringing their cats inside for increasingly longer stays. Other people bring the cat in and shut the door for good. Either way, the key is to provide lots of attention and stimulation while the cat is indoors.

Your geographic location may affect your schedule of change; choose a good time of year to bring the cat indoors. In many parts of the country, the easiest time of year to make this conversion is during the cold winter months when your cat is more likely to want to be inside anyway. By the end of winter, your cat may be completely content to remain inside.

Substitute outside excursions with periods of special play time. Supervised trips out on the patio can also make the transition from outside to inside a little easier. Cats need human companionship to be happy, and when they spend all their time out of doors, they get very little attention. An outdoor cat may welcome the indoors if he or she gets more love, attention, and play.

To keep your cat occupied indoors, provide secure cat condos which offer interesting places to lounge, play and scratch. You should also provide scratching posts, corrugated cardboard or sisal rope for your cat to scratch. Praise your cat for using them.



Photo: Jeff Price



Photo: Irene Davy

To encourage your ex-outdoor cat to exercise, offer interesting toys, especially those that are interactive. These usually consist of a long pole and attached line with fabric or feathers at the end of the line. Some cats enjoy searching for toys. If your cat likes to explore the house looking for “prey,” hide toys in various places so your cat can find them throughout the day. Be sure that the toys are not so small that they can be swallowed or get stuck in your cat’s throat. Cats also enjoy ping pong balls, paper bags and cardboard boxes.

Provide your indoor cat with fresh greens. You can buy kits that include containers and seeds to grow, (see Cattail Gardens at www.cattailgardens.com) or plant pesticide-free alfalfa, grass, bird seed, or catnip in your own container. This way, your cat can graze safely and not destroy your house plants. Many cats love cooked string beans or peas cooled to a safe temperature, which is another way to give them greens.

If your cat remains stubbornly committed to life outdoors, help your cat adjust by providing an outdoor covered enclosure or run that the cat can access through a window or pet door. Such a facility gives the cat some of the advantages of being outside while minimizing the dangers. You can make the outdoor enclosure interesting and appealing by adding objects for the cat to explore, such as tree limbs, multilevel cat condos, tires, toys hanging from branches, and boxes in which the cat can curl up or hide.



Check out the following products:

Cat Enclosure Kit: 1-888-554-PETS, or www.cdpets.com

Kitty Walk at www.midnightpass.com

SafeCat Outdoor Enclosure at: www.just4cats.com

If you cannot, or prefer not to offer your cat a run or enclosure, consider leash-training your cat so you can supervise time outside. Attach the leash to a harness. Your cat may resist leash-training at first, but will eventually accept the leash. Never leave your cat outside unsupervised while on a leash or lead.

Some cats may develop behavioral problems when they are no longer allowed outside. Most of these problems can be attributed to a change in routine that is too abrupt or a lack of attention and stimulation inside. Review your steps and keep working with the cat. Be patient and continue to praise your cat when playing with toys, using the scratching post and litter pan. If your cat becomes destructive or stops using the litter pan, consult a veterinarian or animal behaviorist to find ways to solve the problem. Remember that these symptoms can also be attributed to boredom and loneliness.

If you have just adopted a cat that stayed outdoors all the time, you should keep the cat inside from the beginning; otherwise, you run the risk of losing your cat. Using a long-range water pistol or a shake can when the cat asks to be let out is a very successful and harmless way to curb a cat from wanting to go outside. And don't forget to give your cat extra attention during the transition!

Additional tips for a happy indoor cat:

- ◆ Trim your cat's claws every one to two weeks to keep your cat from damaging furniture, rugs and drapes, or glue on artificial nail caps called *Soft Paws* www.softpaws.com every six to eight weeks.
- ◆ Provide one litter pan per cat and scoop the litter pan at least once daily. With non-clumping litter, change once or twice weekly; with clumping litter, change every two to four weeks.
- ◆ Many cats enjoy the companionship of another cat or compatible dog of the opposite sex. If you can make the financial and emotional commitment, consider adopting another companion animal for yourself and for your cat.

Adapted from, "All Cats Should Be Indoor Cats" by Rhonda Lucas Donald, Shelter Sense, August 1990, and "From Outdoors to Indoors" by Karen Commings, Cat Fancy, September 1993.

For more information, contact:

AMERICAN BIRD CONSERVANCY

CATS INDOORS - THE CAMPAIGN FOR SAFER BIRDS AND CATS

1731 Connecticut Avenue, NW, 3rd Floor

Washington, DC 20009

Phone: 202/234-7181; Fax: 202/234-7182;

E-mail: abc@abcbirds.org; Web site: www.abcbirds.org