

Your Cat: Indoors or Out?

We all want our cats to live long, healthy lives. One of the ways to help ensure this is something we have control over, keeping them inside. Sadly, there are many inherent dangers for cats outside:

- Cars, trucks, etc.
- Access to antifreeze, pesticides and other toxins
- Dangers from other animals
- Risk of contracting a disease
- Getting lost or being taken
- Encountering people with malicious intent

Outdoor cats are also danger to wild birds, killing anywhere from 1.3 to 4 billion birds in the United States each year ([Loss et al. 2013, Nature Communications](#)).

Giving cats opportunities to....*be cats*

While it is true that some cats demand to go outside, it is important to evaluate the risks and examine ways to enrich your cat's **indoor** environment as an alternative to going outside:

- Cats like to hunt, or pretend to hunt, which requires places to hide in and jump out from. Provide your cat with hiding options like cardboard boxes, large grocery bags, or an old suitcase left open.
- Cats require safe resting spots at various elevations: window perches, a bookcase shelf, cat tree, etc.
- You can bring the outside in by cleaning off a small tree branch for her to scratch and climb on.
- Hang a bird feeder or place a bird bath outside the window where her cat tree or window perch is.
- Grow kitty grass, catnip, or catmint. Have two plants that start off outside. Rotate one inside for a week and then back outside and bring the other one in for a week.
- Provide your cat with interactive toys. Try the SmartyKat Hot Pursuit, Petlinks Mystery Motion, or the Hexbug Mouse Cat Toy. For an inexpensive and fun game, spread a sheet on the floor and erratically move a wand toy underneath.

Enrichment should appeal to a cat's senses: smell, sight, sound, touch, and taste. What one cat may thrive with may be of little interest for another cat, so modifications may be necessary to keep all of your cats happy.

For more information about indoor enrichment and safe toys, check out our other handouts:

Your Indoor Cat: Safe and Fun Cat Toys:

oregonhumane.org/wp-content/uploads/8.3.17_Cat_Toys.pdf

Your Indoor Cat: Enrichment Ideas:

oregonhumane.org/wp-content/uploads/5.31.17_Indoor_Cat_Enrichment_Resources.pdf

Being safe outside

If your cat simply refuses to be happy as an inside-only cat, there are ways to prevent exposure to outside hazards and still allow outdoor access.

Fencing: No matter how tall your fence is, your motivated cat will eventually climb out and neighbor cats will climb in. There are ways to prevent this! Purr-fect Fence attaches to your existing fence or wall to prevent escape. This also prevents incoming cats, raccoons, etc. from entering your yard. If you only have a small yard, they make the Purr-fect Playpen, similar to a large cat tent. purrfectfence.com

Catios: A catio (a cat patio) allows your cat to safely transition through a window or cat door from inside your home to the outdoor, enclosed catio. They can be as elaborate as your imagination (and wallet) or as simple as an enclosed resting spot attached to the outside of a window. They provide fresh air, the smell of the outside world and ample stimulation. catiospaces.com

Harnesses: Although not all cats will tolerate walking on a harness, if you start your training when your cat is still young and pair it with a fun wand toy and/or treats it might be easier than you think. If your cat refuses to walk with the harness, try a stroller. You can get out and get your exercise while she gets to breathe fresh air and stimulate her brain with various new smells.

The bottom line is that there are ways to give your cat the enrichment she craves as well as provide safe options for her outside. It may require some time, creativity, and in some cases monetary resources, but there are always do-it-yourself options available as well.

Need help? Call our free pet behavior help line at (503) 416-2983.