



Safe Outdoor Experiences for your Cat

With inclusions from Denver Dumb Friends League and Humane Society of the United States.

If you want your cat to live a long and healthy life, keep them inside. If you allow your cat to wander around on their own, without your supervision, she is susceptible to any of the following tragedies:

- ❖ being hit by a car
- ❖ ingesting a deadly poison like antifreeze or a pesticide
- ❖ becoming trapped by an unhappy neighbor
- ❖ being attacked by a roaming dog, cat or wild animal
- ❖ contracting an illness from another animal
- ❖ becoming lost and unable to find their way home
- ❖ being stolen
- ❖ encountering an adult or child with cruel intentions

Considerations to make with indoor/outdoor cats:

Fenced/walled backyards

Cats can easily scale or dig under most standard fences/walls so cat-proof fencing is a must if you are expecting it to keep the cat in the yard. The fencing must be higher than a cat can jump vertically, angled steeply enough that they cannot get over it, and not located too close to trees or other structures that the cat could climb or jump onto, allowing them to get over the fence. Coyote Rollers and Purrfect Fence systems may help limit the cat's ability to climb out, but if the cat is trying to dig *under*, an additional barrier will need to be in place for prevention. A cat can also squeeze their body into any space that their head will fit, so gaps/sagging fencing will not be escape-proof.

Keep in mind that if a cat is extremely determined to get out, almost nothing will keep a cat in the yard, and predators such as coyotes, bobcats, and birds of prey can still get *in*.

Litterboxes

Your cat's diet, type of litter used, and how often the box is cleaned all factor in to how much you notice the litter box odors. You can opt for unscented litter to avoid perfume smells, and get non-clumping litter that does not have to be scooped, just replaced. Rinse and wipe the litter box with a washrag and 1:1 vinegar water, or baking soda with hydrogen peroxide (1Tbsp baking soda per 16oz of peroxide) to kill odors on plastic litterbox surfaces. There are many types of litter boxes or techniques you can use to keep dogs out of the litter as well. If your cat is having litterbox issues, and the cat is already spayed/neutered, there may be a medical cause for the behavior, so a vet visit should be in order. (See also "Solving Litter Box Problems" handout.)

Create an inviting indoor space

Exercise and Feeding

Providing your cat with an interactive playtime routine can help them get plenty of exercise indoors, help them stay fit, and is a great way to bond with your cat. There are many great examples of interactive toys in the handout: "Cat Toys and How To Use Them".

Puzzle feeders require your cat to work for their food. This provides both mental stimulation and exercise for your cat. If your cat is becoming overweight, you can provide measured feeding and work with your veterinarian to create a diet plan.

Changing Habits

When bringing home a new cat, the best thing to do is establish a routine of the great indoors so they have less desire to go outside. If you have a cat who is used to going out, create a new routine, which involves extra playtime and attention. If they are insistent, do not relent and let them out! Continue with your newly

established routine. Additionally, you can build a new habit by introducing them to harness training (see below) at the same time. Your cat will learn that they can only go out when they are wearing a harness and leash, on *your* schedule.

Door Darting

If your cat is a door darter, you can break this habit by ignoring the cat when you go to the door, or distracting them when you need to go out the door (using a treat puzzle or tossing a toy away from the door). If the cat is not spayed/neutered, they will have a much stronger desire to go out due to their hormonal desire to mate. A female in heat will often escape through screens, windows, or doors, and come back pregnant the next day. For stubborn cats, automatic deterrents such as Ssscat spray are effective at keeping cats away from the door.

Allow safe access to the outdoors

Harness Training

You can help your cat explore safely by using a harness and leash. Whether your cat will become comfortable with this depends on the cat's personality and how much time you are willing to invest in training. Most cats will not leash walk in the same way as a dog. They would rather meander about or sit and observe their surroundings. The leash should never be attached to a collar, as it is very easy for a cat to escape or become strangled. Purchase a harness that is specifically designed for cats. Walking jackets and the "Come with Me Kitty" harness are popular options, but make sure you read any reviews before purchasing a harness for your cat to ensure you have the best one for your purpose. Never tie your cat out on a harness/leash.

First, you need to get the cat comfortable wearing the harness indoors. Reward them with treats and attention while they have the harness on and let them walk around with the harness on. Keep sessions short and do this for a week or so until they are comfortable. The next step is to attach the leash to the harness and let them drag that around. Keep a close eye on the cat to ensure they do not get caught or tangled, and continue to reward the cat. The third step is to walk your cat indoors. Put the harness and leash on the cat, and follow them around while holding the end of the leash. When they are used to this feeling, try to gently guide them with a little bit of leash pressure, and coax them with a treat or the promise of pets. Reward the cat if they walk on their own as well. Finally, you are ready to bring the training outside. Make sure the weather is calm and comfortable, so they are not spooked. Holding the end of the leash, walk your harnessed cat to the door, then encourage them to go out, using a treat or by leading/calling them to come out. If the cat is nervous, do not force them. You can try again at another time. When the cat is outside, reward with treats and attention. Keep the first outdoor sessions short, so you end on a good note. Gradually increase the amount of time your cat is outdoors on their leash and harness as they become more adapted.

Strollers and Backpacks

Sometimes your cat would rather have you do the walking, but will still enjoy the outdoor scenery. You should still get your cat comfortable wearing a harness before attempting these. Pet strollers and backpacks have a strap that clips onto your cat's harness to keep them securely inside. You will want to use a stroller/backpack that fully zips shut so the cat cannot shove their face out and attempt an escape.

Kitty Tents and Playpens

These allow your cat a chance to spend time outdoors and enjoy their surroundings safely. They may be made of nylon or metal and can fold down or roll out to allow your cat to enjoy their yard in a portable, temporary space. They zip or latch closed to keep your cat safely confined. Keep an eye on your cat while inside to ensure they are not trying to escape, especially for nylon or fabric, and do not leave the cat unattended for long periods of time, as they may be more exposed to outdoor elements.

Outdoor Catos

If you want to provide your cat with a more permanent outdoor space, consider building or having a catio (cat patio) built for your cat. A catio is a fully enclosed outdoor space. The possibilities are virtually endless, and may be as simple as a boxed in windowsill or an outdoor room fitted with furniture, water fountains, and plants. A catio may be attached to the house or freestanding. Attached catios often have a pet door or window allowing access for the cat to come and go as they please, but with the flexibility to be closed off when you are away from home or during bad weather. With a freestanding catio, you would place the cat directly inside during their "outdoor" time. These can be built on a budget, and there are lots of great ideas online for DIY catios, prefab catio kits for purchase, and professionally built catios.