Outdoor Fun for Indoor Cats

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

The average life span of a free-roaming cat is less than three years, compared to 12-15 years for the average indoor-only cat. Our own experience with caring for cats confirms these numbers. And, we believe that the weight of these numbers is behind the trend of cat owners making the safety, health, and happiness of their pet a priority by:

- **Keeping their cats indoors**
- **Creating safe enclosures for unsupervised outdoor activity**
- **Enjoying the outdoors with their pet in shared activity**

Even within the home, there are safety threats to your pet, but the incidence of traumatic events is extremely small by comparison to cats who spend a majority of their time outdoors. The statistics alone should convince you that your pet needs an indoor lifestyle to keep safe.

Treat your cat to the good life, indoors and out

Virtually everything your cat needs - play, exercise, a good diet, rest, and companionship - can be had readily, indoors. The notion that a cat must roam free to be happy is a myth that may end his or her life prematurely. He or she can get all of the fresh air and sunshine he or she needs safely under your supervision.

Open the door to healthy activity

In preparation for any outdoor activity, make sure your cat has a collar with identification, is fully vaccinated, and is spayed or neutered. With a bit of planning, you can create a safe backyard environment for your "indoor" pet, or even stroll about the community together, enjoying the benefits of nature.

Create a controlled outdoor environment for safety

Depending on the style of your home and the layout of your yard, one or more of the following options can work to provide your cat safe, outdoor access:

Fence - Because cats are great leapers, erecting a fence tall enough to keep your pet in, and others out, can be challenging. Wire mesh, hung at a 45 degree angle along the top of the fence, can effectively limit escapes. Or, use the In-ground fence for cats to create an invisible boundary that contain kitty's outdoor activities.

Cages and Pens - Portable, fence-type kennels, like those used for dogs, work equally well for most cats. The collapsibleKitty Condo is a large, attractive cage, measuring 36" x 24" x 48" high, and has the added advantage of moveable shelves and ramps which are ideal for play. Note: Always be sure your cat has access to shade.

Door - Installing a cat door connected to a screened-in porch or a fenced yard (or run), frees your cat to enjoy the outdoors as she desires, and provides a quick escape from predators.

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Enjoy outdoor activity together

Owners in both urban and suburban areas are discovering the fun and value of walking with their cat. Some cats, with a bit of training, will take successfully to a leash or harness. To "walk" others, you will need a stroller. A pet stroller gives your cat a moving view of sights and sounds around her while keeping her safely enclosed. Perfect to use when you take your daily walks, so you can bring your cat along too.

Leash - Because most cats won't walk on a leash naturally, you must teach them. For your first walks, try starting in the late evening or early in the morning in a quiet area. Your cat is much more likely to venture out when there's no one else around. Most cats take a few days to adjust to the idea of leash walking. Because cats don't like to feel restricted, use a lightweight nylon leash that's about four to five feet long.

Harness - A harness or combination harness-collar will give you better control over your cat during walks.

Carrier - You can carry your pet anytime, anywhere, and protect her from other animals, putting an end to impromptu "street fights." With adjustable shoulder and waist straps, carriers are comfortable for you and your pet. They are also ideal transport for ailing or disabled pets.

It's a dangerous world out there

- diseases
- poisons
- predators
- parasites
- accidents
- cruelty
- fights
- lost

It's a wonderful life, with your help

It is a mistake to assume that cats are fiercely independent and, therefore, happier in the wild. The duration and quality of your pet's life depends on the protection and care that you provide. Indoors and out, there is a lot to enjoy together.

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