



Keeping Your Cat Happy Indoors

It's a myth that going outside is a requirement for feline happiness. Playing regularly with a cat easily satisfies her stalking instinct, keeps her stimulated, and provides the exercise she needs to stay healthy and happy. Here are some tips for safely confining your cat and making the great indoors an interesting, feline-friendly environment that meets all of your cat's needs:

Start young. Kittens who are kept indoors usually show no desire to venture outside when they grow up.

Play with your cat each day. Try different types of toys that allow your cat to stalk, chase, pounce, and kick. When you've tired out your cat, store toys that could cause harm (such as toys with strings attached) out of reach. You can leave "toys" such as paper bags with the handles removed and cardboard boxes out when you cannot supervise. Be sure to switch the toys from time to time so that they seem "new" and more interesting to your cat.

Install a perch indoors near a sunny window. Padded perches can be purchased at many pet supply stores or through catalog retailers. Another option is an enclosure that sits in a window frame (much like an air conditioning unit) and provides a secure space in which your kitty can "hang out." Larger options are available that attach to the side of a house or ground-floor apartment patio (commonly called a "catio"). It's best to allow your cat access to these when someone is home to supervise.

Buy a ready-made cat tree (often called a "kitty condo") or make your own. A cat tree may stretch from floor-to-ceiling or be shorter. It provides great climbing opportunities and, in multi-cat households, creates more play and rest areas by taking advantage of vertical space. If you can, locate the cat tree next to a window so your cat can watch the action outdoors.

Plant cat grass (available from pet supply stores) in indoor pots so your cat can graze.

If you live in a peaceful neighborhood in which you can walk without encountering loose dogs, consider buying a harness and training your cat to walk on a leash. This training takes time and patience, for both you and the cat, and it's easiest when your cat is young. Some cats can even be trained to sit on your lap while you are on the deck or patio, or harnessed and tied to a stationary object to enjoy the outdoors while you are gardening nearby (but be sure to never leave your cat alone while he/she is tied to a stationary object).

If appropriate, get your cat a feline friend. They can provide one another with companionship and entertainment.

Even cats who are protected from roaming free should still be outfitted with a collar and visible identification. The occasional open window (make sure your windows have secure screens) or door offers a tempting opportunity for your cat to explore the outdoors. And your cat may become frightened and make her way outside if strangers come to work on your house or if there is a fire or similar disaster. The collar and visible ID could help someone get your pet back to you. For extra insurance, have your cat microchipped and keep your contact information with the registry up to date. If you do lose your cat, contact your local animal shelter immediately to file a report. Shelter workers can give you tips on getting your pet back home safely.