

Keeping Cats Indoors

People often have a romantic image of an outdoor cat's life, and take offense at the idea of keeping their pet inside. While it's true some cats enjoy the out-of-doors, they also face serious hazards that can jeopardize their lives. A major risk for outdoor cats, and one we hear about all too often, is being hit by a car. Cats can also get stuck in a garage, basement, or other space where they can become dehydrated or starve. And encounters with other cats can expose your cat to diseases, some of which cannot be vaccinated against. Finally, there are people who simply do not want cats in their yard. These disgruntled neighbors may trap your outdoor cat and take him or her to the animal control center. Fortunately, there are many ways to help your feline friend to have a happy, fulfilled life indoors or to allow your cat a safe outdoor experience.

Making the outdoors safe:

- If your backyard has a fence around it, consider installing the Cat Fence. This netting system prevents your cat from leaving the yard, so you know where he or she is at all times. It can also be used to keep other cats out of your yard.
- Build an enclosure outside. This allows the cat to have an outdoor experience while remaining safe. Check cat magazines for ideas and plans.
- If you have a younger cat, train him or her to accept a leash and harness. This way, you can take the cat on monitored outdoor excursions. While a few brave cats may enjoy walks around the neighborhood, the majority will prefer sticking close to home—the front or back yard. But never tie your cat outside or inside.

Transitioning a cat to indoors only:

- Above all, be patient. After all, your cat is going to be adjusting to a new way of life. Give your pet time and be willing to try a variety of techniques.
- Put screens on your windows and get a kitty window seat.
- Play with your cat more. Get him running around, chasing a string or other toy several times a day. A little catnip makes it even more fun!
- Add vertical space to the cat's territory. Cat trees, cat condos, shelves, and other climbing apparatus give your cat more places to climb, play, and call her own.
- Provide scratching posts. Try posts made of different materials—corrugated cardboard, wood, carpet, or sisal rope. You can get freestanding scratching posts, floor level, or door hanging varieties.
- Play videos. Many cats enjoy watching videos of cats, birds, fish, insects and nature scenes. Check your local pet supply and video stores.
- Grow kitty grass. Available at many pet supply stores, it is safe and tasty for your cat to nibble.
- If your cat is an “only child”, consider adopting another to keep him company.

Remember: even indoor cats should always wear an elastic or breakaway collar and an identification tag. In a fire, burglary, or other mishap, a cat can

easily become lost outside and identification is her best bet for getting home safely.

This information is courtesy of the San Francisco Cat Behavior Helpline at (415) 554-3075 or catbehavior@sfpca.org.