



## Indoor Cat Wants to Become an Outdoor Cat

Most people who adopt a cat want it to be primarily, if not 100% of the time, indoors. But what if your new cat is bound and determined to be outside more than what you are comfortable with? What do you do then? Have you considered if you are meeting your cat's fundamental needs? If not, consider reviewing the handouts "Feline Fundamentals" and "Is My Cat Bored?". The biggest thing to make sure you are providing for your cat is facilitating pretend play in some way. There are many different toys to choose from, but the main point is that you need to acknowledge that your new family member has the need to stalk, hunt, kill and eat. A lot of behavior issues that surface, especially in younger cats, can stem from the lack of structured playtime. If you have tried all the avenues you know to meet your cat's needs, then it may be time to think outside of the box and possibly allow some access to outdoors.

The most important thing to evaluate before making this decision is to thoroughly investigate the safety of where you live. Are your surrounding neighbor's cat friendly? Do you have predatory activity (e.g., coyotes, birds of prey)? Do you live near a busy road? Also, try to adjust your mindset of weighing the pros and cons of changing your cat's lifestyle. Is there any sort of compromise you can do with your current lifestyle to accommodate the needs of your new cat? Many people want a solely indoor cat, and that's okay. But what could you offer your cat to satisfy their needs indoors if you aren't willing to let them explore outdoors? More often than not, cats that are in a shelter arrived there because they were found as a wandering stray. This indicates that the majority of cats found were once probably indoor/outdoor to some capacity in their previous home. Most cats adjust perfectly fine to an indoor-only lifestyle, but there are some occasions where a cat may need more if their fundamental needs cannot be accomplished indoors. Access to outdoors can fulfill those needs for them.

### When to NOT Make Your Cat an Indoor/Outdoor Cat

Before we go over the benefits and recommendations to having an indoor/outdoor cat, it's important to realize when you should NOT consider letting your cat outside.

- If they are using the bathroom outside of the litterbox. The first step you should take when this happens is going to a veterinarian to make sure there is not an underlying medical concern. If your cat is cleared medically, evaluate the environment the litterbox is in and if any changes have happened recently in your home.
- If your cat is inappropriately scratching furniture or people. Take a step back and look at where their scratching posts are. Do they even have those? Maybe you need to provide different options for them. If your cat is scratching you or another human (or animal), investigate what led to that altercation. Was your cat trying to give signals that they wanted to be left alone (tail flicking, ears back, swatting, hissing, etc.)? Refer to our "Destructive Scratching" handout for further information.
- If your cat is fearful and hiding. They probably just need more time to decompress and acclimate to their new surroundings. If you have granted them access to your whole home, start them off in a smaller space again that is less overwhelming. A fearful cat is not the type of cat that thrives outdoors; they lack the confidence to handle potential dangers/hazards.

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- If your cat is declawed, being outside unsupervised can be extremely dangerous! They have no way to climb onto something to evade a predator. Plus, a cat's first line of defense is to swat/scratch a potential threat. But once you have removed that defense, the only option they have left is to bite, which is not as effective to deter a predator.

## Benefits

Now that you have decided whether your cat is a candidate for trips outside, here are some benefits in trying this out.

- If you can safely let your cat have access to outdoors or transition to an indoor/outdoor lifestyle, you will have a cat that is more settled when they are indoors.
- If your cat was a habitual door darter, you should start to see that behavior less and less the more frequent the trips outside are.
- It can be fun watching your cat enjoy their time outside, even if it is for a short period of time. This time together can help you bond with your new cat and give you a new appreciation for felines doing what they do best!
- Your cat can channel some of their natural behaviors and release their inner jungle cat outside and not in your home. This means more peace for you and for your cat.

## Recommendations

Now that you know the benefits to trying outdoor time with your cat, how do you manage this transition safely? What are other opportunities for a cat to be outdoors but also be confined? If you are not sure where to begin in the process of letting your cat enjoy outdoor time or ways around having them unsupervised outside, here are some helpful tips.

- Start slowly! You can set this to your level of comfort. The safest option is to start by trying to walk your cat on a harness. You will need to get them used to the harness first. If they don't walk around like a dog, that is fine. Your cat will still be able to experience different smells and textures that normally do not exist in your home.
- Another very safe option is building/buying a catio. This won't be the most cost-effective option, but it is something to consider investing in if you really don't feel comfortable letting your cat venture outside alone.
- If you have a screened-in porch, maybe create a way for your cat to go out there on their own by installing a cat door. If your porch/deck isn't screened in, then try letting your cat out there with you and monitor them. If you don't have a gate to bar access off the porch/deck, then you may want to create some sort of barrier so you can keep your cat enclosed with you.
- After several supervised ventures outside, start to increase the distance between you and your cat. If your cat is treat-motivated, try seeing if a treat bag/jar will lure them back to you when you call them. You can also start giving a cue word when you feed your cat and pair that with something high value, like wet food. The most common thing would be "Here, kitty, kitty..." and when the cat comes you give them the wet food as a reward. This could help establish a way for you to call your cat back from outside.
- It is also highly encouraged to speak to your veterinarian about what vaccines, dewormer, and flea/tick prevention are recommended now that your cat may be spending more time outside. Please consult with your veterinarian also about what diseases your cat may now be susceptible to outdoors and consider that when you are choosing what route to take to let your cat have outdoor time.

**DISCLAIMER:** There are various real dangers to consider if your cat goes outside. You cannot control the environment outdoors or what your cat may come across. Doing checks on your cat once they return home will ensure they do not have a minor injury that may turn into something serious if left unnoticed. If your neighborhood is not cat friendly (e.g., neighbors, dogs, coyotes, etc.), then you may need to explore more controlled options for outdoor time and be more certain of your surroundings.

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