

Healthy & Happy Indoor Cat

INTRODUCTION

Cats can be happily kept inside all the time. Many people do so and would have it no other way. They say they have deeper and more satisfying relationships with their cats and that those cats are healthier and live longer. While living happily inside, cats are not getting hit by cars, being injured in cat fights, catching infections such as feline leukemia virus and feline immunodeficiency virus (Feline "AIDS"), being stolen, hunting and possibly killing wildlife, urinating and defecating on neighbors' properties, and harassing or being harassed by other animals. Clearly there are many good reasons for permanently keeping cats indoors and outdoors in a protected area.

ISN'T IT CRUEL?

Some people feel that it is cruel to confine cats because they think of them as "free spirits" that should be allowed to roam at will because of their nature. They seem to give little thought to the possible consequences listed above. So, how can we resolve this dilemma? We can do so by enriching the daily life of the indoor cat to replace some of the stimulation and activity it would otherwise receive as a free-roaming animal. This environmental enrichment puts complexity, unpredictability and choices into a cat's daily life. Without these things, many animals and people become frustrated in confinement and show signs of boredom-greater reactivity, irritability and exaggerated or unusual behavior.

HOW IS IT DONE?

1. **Play with your cat!** Chasing and jumping after toys is a great way to provide exercise and stimulation. This can be done with small balls, string toys, and even laser pointers.
2. **Feeding** – Make your cat work for his food. Scatter dry food or treats throughout the house so he has to search for it. You can start by hiding it close to the bowl and progressively move it farther away each day. You can also buy toys that dispense food and treats as they play with it.
3. **Obedience Work** – Cats are highly intelligent and can easily be taught new behaviors. Reward desired behaviors with treats or toys. Mental stimulation is just as important as physical exercise!
4. **Watching an Interesting Scene** – Provide a window perch or screened-in porch so your cat can see the outside world. You can also use a fish aquarium if you have the time for the upkeep.
5. **High-Levels** – They enjoy watching the world from above! High shelves and walkways encourage cats to jump. Buy or make an indoor climbing tree. This can double as a scratching post, which encourages cats to climb and scratch.
6. **Get-Away Areas** – Cats feel secure in small enclosed areas. This can be obtained easily by providing a cat house or bed. You can even place a blanket or bed in an upturned cardboard box and cut a door in the side.

7. **Scratching Post** - Scratching is a natural behavior that cats enjoy. They like to stretch out their muscles and scratching releases endorphins that cause pleasure. Cats can be trained to scratch only on their post.
8. **Paper Bags and Boxes** – Cats love to investigate new containers! Allowing them access to new shapes and smells will add novelty to their lives. You can throw in toys and treats to make it more interesting.
9. **Catnip, Cat Mint and Cat Grasses** – These plants are available at pet supply stores. You can also grow your own indoors from seeds. They are attractive to many cats and give the cat fresh vegetation to eat, which they would otherwise do outdoors.
10. **Trips Outside** – Train your cat to walk on a harness and leash! This fun activity is bonding time for you and your cat, and offers them a safe opportunity to explore the great outdoors. Make sure to find a harness specifically designed for cats – cats are notoriously good at slipping out of collars and harnesses!
11. **Outdoor Enclosures** – A screened in porch works well to give your cat a safe vantage point to look outside. You can also use wire netting to enclose an area alongside your house, or create enclosures of different sizes connected by walkways from the house.
12. **Companion Cat** – For cats that are left on their own for long periods each day, it can be a good idea to provide a feline companion. This social interaction will enrich their daily lives, and giving them a playmate offers them a chance to release energy through games of chase and wrestling while you are gone. Make sure to research information on how to properly introduce your new cat into the household.

SUMMARY

An outdoor cat lives a more stressful life than an indoor cat, and stress leads to a myriad of physical and psychological disorders. Outdoor cats on the street, or even in the country, are faced every day with territorial disputes, threats from other animals, people, cars, environmental noises which cause panic, and situations which generate pure fear. Indoor cats generally live longer and healthier lives than outdoor cats - a fact that cannot be disputed.