

Do Cats Need To Roam Outside?
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This week we have a short quiz for you cat fanciers. Answer true or false to each statement.

1. Cats need some “outside time” when they can roam free.
2. Cats that roam freely outside live shorter lives than those that live indoors.
3. Cats that roam freely outside don’t present a significant nuisance to others.

The first and third questions are false and the second is true. Often people let their cats roam freely in the neighborhood because they think that their cats need some outside time. There is no evidence that cats “need” to roam freely outside. They are not harmed physically or behaviorally if they do not get outside. Certainly there are some cats that are very persistent about wanting to go outside, especially those that have been outside cats in the past. They can meow, howl, pester and try to dash out the door or even try to break out of windows. This can be distressing to owners and sometimes the easiest way to deal with such pesky cats is to just let them out. This is not a good idea because it shortens the lives of cats to be allowed to roam freely outside. They can be injured in fights with other cats, by dogs and wild animals, killed by cars and trucks and subject to diseases from other animals.

Cats that roam freely can also become a significant nuisance to the community by eliminating in the neighbors gardens and yards, by digging up plants, killing wild birds and small animals, getting into fights with neighbor cats and if they are not spayed or neutered, by reproducing and often leaving kittens that end up in shelters. Roaming cats can also harass indoor cats by threatening them, attacking them through windows and doors and by spraying the outside of neighbor’s houses. Such harassment can lead the indoor cats to spray, fight with other indoor cats or even attack their owners. In some communities, it is illegal to let a cat roam freely away from an owner’s property.

If you have an outdoor cat the best thing you can do for her is to bring her inside and make her an indoor cat. If your indoor cat wants to go outside, try to distract her with play or attention when she gets pesky. If this doesn’t help, try putting her on a time-out away from the doors until she has quieted down. Try to enrich her environment with toys, things to climb and things to scratch. If these things don’t work and you feel you need to give the cat some outside time, either build an outside cage where the cat can be outside but safe, or cat-proof your back yard so the cat cannot escape and let her out back when she wants out. If these things are not feasible, consider putting her on a harness and leash and taking her outside under supervision.