

Make Indoors Better Than Outdoors for Your Cat

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One of our readers wants to know how to train a kitten to be an indoor cat. Let's consider why cats would want to go outside. One powerful influence involves territorial defense, courtship and mating. To decrease this motivation, spay or neuter kittens before they reach sexual maturity to decrease the desire to roam and mate.

Cats may also want to go outside because the outside environment may be more interesting and fun than the inside. To address this factor, create a stimulating indoor environment for your cat.

Provide floor to ceiling posts with perches at different levels so cats can climb and view their world from "on high!" Make other tall areas acceptable and attractive by placing a small cat pillow on top of the refrigerator or dedicating the top shelf of a tall bookcase to your cat. One of our cat's favorite tall perching places is the top of the kitchen cabinets. Also, bring a little of the outdoors inside in the form of a section of tree limb with bark attached that you may have trimmed off in your spring pruning. Many cats love to scratch bark.

Provide plenty of interesting toys, ranging from cat dancers (toys which dangle on the end of a flexible rod), to boxes and paper sacks for your cat to hide in, to small crinkly objects such as pieces of paper which your cat can chase and attack as he would prey.

Remember that although cats seem to be able to adjust their activity levels to those of the family to some degree, they are still primarily nocturnal and will tend to be active at night. Try scheduling a tiring play session in the evening or right before you go to bed.

If your cat pesters to be let outside: 1) Completely ignore the behavior. If it never gets him what he wants he may eventually quit trying; 2) Distract the cat into another activity such as playing or eating a special tidbit; or 3) if all else fails, use some sort of a remote punisher to stop the behavior.

We often use a small, hand-held device that emits a loud ultrasonic noise that most cats find quite disturbing but is harmless. Never hit your cat. If your cat is relentless in his quest for the outside, train him to a harness and leash so he can be tied out **under supervision**, or build him an outdoor enclosure. Humane societies, animal control agencies and veterinarians often have handouts on how to build one. Cats don't have to roam to live long, happy and healthy lives.