

Helping an Outdoor Cat Adjust to Life Indoors

Although it takes patience and work, an outdoor cat can be turned into a perfectly content indoor pet. The key is to make the conversion gradually and to provide lots of attention and stimulation while the cat is indoors.

Begin by only letting the cat outside during the middle of the day. Cats do most of their hunting between dawn and dusk, and this change will help shift them from the hunting urge. Gradually shorten the length of time the cat is outside until you no longer let him or her out at all. Cats are creatures of habit, so you must be careful to slowly replace their old routine of going outside with a new one of staying in. Substitute outside excursions with periods of special playtime. Supervised trips out on the balcony, deck, or patio can make the transition from outside to inside a little easier. Some cat owners even screen in porches or small enclosures from their homes. These enclosed "outdoor" environments protect the cats yet allow them to get fresh air and sunshine. (For ideas see the "Catnip" web site – an Australian company making modular cat parks at www.catnip.com.au)

Provide plenty to keep the cat occupied inside. Especially important is extra play and attention time. Cats need human companionship to be happy, and when they spend all their time out of doors, they get very little TLC. An outdoor cat may welcome the indoors if he or she gets lots of love, attention and play.

Try to have a litter tray for each cat, positioned in a quiet spot where the cat won't be disturbed. Keep it very clean as cats are very fussy about their litter trays. If you use a litter tray with high sides the cat can dig to it's heart's content and not spread the litter around on your floor.

This is a tough one, but don't give in to your cat's wails to be let out. If you are diligent, your cat will eventually see that all the fuss is getting him or her nowhere.

It is true that some cats will develop behavioural problems when they are no longer allowed outside. Most of these problems can be attributed to a change in routine that is too abrupt or to lack of attention and stimulation inside. If your cat becomes destructive or unhousetrained, consult a veterinarian or animal behaviourist to find ways to solve the problem. Remember that these symptoms can also be attributed to boredom and loneliness.