

## Keeping Cats Happy Indoors

Owners will swear that their cats will be miserable if they are cooped up in the house all the time. This attitude perpetuates itself if the pet owner makes no effort to provide the cat with a stimulating environment. But with a little attention to what a cat likes and needs, a pet owner can create a home that keeps the cats healthy, safe and happy.

In her April 1990 'Cat Fancy' article, "Bringing the outdoors in" Barbara L. Diamond suggests that cat owners "take a few minutes to view the home from the cat's perspective" in order to "shape the healthiest and most rewarding indoor environment possible". Here are some tips from Diamond {along with a couple of our own} to help cat owners keep their pets amused and fit behind closed doors:

- Open screened windows to let some fresh air in. Fresh air and sunshine are great for cats. Just be sure the screen is secure. If window ledges aren't wide enough for the cats to sit on, shelves are available that attach to ledges for cats to perch on and watch the world go by.
- Plant pots of indoor greens for cats to chew on. Grass, alfalfa, or catnip will provide cats with fresh, tasty treats that aren't exposed to chemicals and pesticides.
- Give cats something to do while everyone is away. Hiding a few treats around the house gives the pet something to look forward to. But cats do catch on to this game quickly, so you have to be sneaky. Open paper bags left out, cardboard boxes or open closets can give cats new frontiers to explore.
- Offer the cats toys that are safe and stimulating. "When choosing toys try to think like a cat" Diamond advises. "Is the toy furry or feathery? Can it be made to hop or fly? Does it move and feel like a small prey?" These kinds of toys will provide cats with the most exercise and amusement.
- Diamond also cautions "avoid toys with small or loose parts that become lodged in your cat's throat or be swallowed". And don't forget the cat's need to scratch and climb. A scratching post at least two feet high is essential - a floor to ceiling pole with perches is even better.
- Play games with your cat. Human companionship is a very real need for cats. What better way to provide this and make your cat happy than by playing with him or her? In addition to playing with cat toys, a cat may also enjoy games of chase, peek-a-boo around doors, capturing non-toxic soap bubbles, or chasing light spots created with a flashlight or reflective object.

If cats have their owner's love and attention and lots to do on the inside, they won't miss the great outdoors, which, after close examination, isn't so great for cats at all.



## 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](http://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.