

Indoor or Outdoor Cats

Did you know the average lifespan of an outdoor cat is less than 3 years? Compare this to the average lifespan of 12 to 15 years for an indoor cat. Here are some of the most common hazards faced by outdoor cats.

- Cruelty - Not all people love cats. Cats have been known to be injured by angry neighbors who dislike cats digging in their gardens or hunting birds.
- Unfriendly dogs - Dogs can inflict life-threatening injuries especially to cats who have learned to trust dogs.
- Other cats - If your cat gets into a territorial fight with another cat and is bitten, it could result in the spread of disease or a painful abscess, with the need for veterinary care. Always check your cat for painful lumps and bumps.
- Predators such as coyotes and raccoons - In many areas, wild animals are potential predators.
- Diseases - Contact with wild animals and other cats can result in the transmission of life-threatening diseases such as [feline leukemia](#) or [feline immunodeficiency virus](#).
- [Parasites](#) - The risk of infestations with fleas, ticks, intestinal worms, and other parasites increases in outdoor cats.
- [Poisons](#) - Although you may have "cat-proofed" your outdoor area, others may not have, and your cat could be exposed to toxic substances such as antifreeze or pesticides.
- Vehicles - An outside cat darting across the street can be an unfortunate victim of a moving vehicle, and cats that are hit by cars rarely survive.
- Harsh weather: Weather conditions can change abruptly, and your cat could experience [frostbite](#) in the winter or dehydration, burning of paw pads, and/or skin cancer in the summer.
- Getting lost: Your cat could be shut into a building, stolen, taken to an animal shelter, or adopted by others.

Here are some things you can do to make the indoors more exciting to your feline companions:

1. Activity Centers - Cat trees and play furniture provide tall places for climbing and observation, and scratching posts and toys for stimulation. Available in a range of colors, styles, and options to fit your décor, and the needs of your cat. Remember to rearrange the activity centers periodically in order to keep your cat's interest.
2. Treats - To keep her alert, break up your cat's routine. Stash delicious treats around your home to encourage your cat to use his senses to seek and find the treat. Provide an occasional catnip treat, for some energetic fun and excitement.
3. Window Perches - Install a window perch to afford your cat a warm place to nap in the sun, and a "birds-eye" view of the outdoors.
4. Toys - Find toys that appeal to your specific cat, and remember to rotate them on a weekly basis to prevent boredom. Simple things like cardboard boxes, paper bags, and rolls of paper can provide many distractions.

5. Companions - Some cats will do much better with another pet in the house. Another cat or a dog can provide companionship, interactive play, and many exercise activities.
6. Vertical access - Cats love to climb and relax in high places. Having things to climb in that provide access to tall perches or shelving can keep your cats happy and relaxed. Cats are great at escaping stress. When the nieces or nephews, grandchildren, or friend's dogs, or in-laws come to visit, this can be pretty stressful for cats that are used to living a quiet, non chaotic life with very few visitors. Having places to hide and high places to rest allow cats to escape stress that some visitors may bring.

Finally, some ways to make the outdoors safer for your cat:

1. Identification - In preparation for any outdoor activity, make sure your cat has a harness or breakaway collar with identification. Microchipping is extremely important in case the collar falls off.
2. Preventive health measures - If your cat will be outside, be sure he or she is fully vaccinated, and spayed or neutered. Talk to your veterinarian about an appropriate worming schedule.
3. Runs and pens - Commercial mesh cat runs set up quickly and protect your cat, allowing her to enjoy fresh air, watch birds, and bask in the warm sunshine. Sections can be connected giving her more space to roam.
4. Fences - Because cats are great leapers, erecting a fence tall enough to keep your pet in, and others out, can be challenging. Wire mesh, hung at a 45 degree angle along the top of the fence, can effectively limit escapes.
5. Doors - Installing a cat door connected to a screened-in porch, fenced yard, or a run frees your cat to enjoy the outdoors as he desires, and provides a quick escape from predators.
6. Leashes - Because most cats won't walk on a leash naturally, you must teach them. For your first walks, try starting in the late evening or early in the morning in a quiet area. Your cat is much more likely to venture out when there's no one else around. Most cats take a few days to adjust to the idea of leash walking. Because cats don't like to feel restricted, use a lightweight nylon leash that's about four to five feet long, or a retractable lead which will help eliminate tugging, pulling and straining, and enable your cat to roam up to 16 feet. For cats, it is best to use a harness instead of a collar.
7. Environmental safety - Attach a bell to your cat's harness collar to prevent her from killing songbirds or small mammals and to alert people that she is around.
8. Timing - If you do allow your cat outside unconfined, do so when you are home and can supervise; preferably during the daytime and periods of low traffic to reduce the hazards he will be exposed to.