

Keeping Cats Happy Indoors!

Some owners will swear their cats are miserable if they are cooped up in the house all the time. However, cats who live indoors, in a stimulating environment, and whose owners pay attention to what they like and need, will live healthy, safe, and happy (not to mention longer) lives.

In Barbara L. Diamond's *Cat Fancy* article, "Bringing the Outdoors In," she 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 environment possible." Simply put, with a little creative thoughtfulness it's easy to create an engaging and alluring indoor living environment for your cat(s). Here are some tips to help cat owners keep their pets amused and healthy behind closed doors:

- **Open screened windows to let some fresh air in and set up perches** where they can watch birds from the safety of inside. Fresh air and sunshine are great for cats. Just be sure the screen is secure. If window ledges aren't wide enough to perch on, shelves are available to create ledges for cats to sit on and watch the world go by.
- **Bring the outdoors in.** Plant pots of indoor green grass for cats to chew on. Grass, alfalfa, catmint and catnip will provide cats with fresh, tasty treats that aren't exposed to chemicals or pesticides.
- **Give cats something to do while everyone is away.** Hiding a few treats around the house gives your pet something to look forward to, though cats do catch onto this game quickly, so you have to be sneaky! Open paper bags left out or open closets can give cats new frontiers to explore.
- **Offer cat toys that are safe and stimulating.** When choosing toys, try to think like a cat. Is the toy furry or feathery? Does it look and feel like small prey? Can it be made to hop or fly? Don't forget cats need to scratch and climb. A scratching post at least two feet tall is essential. Offering different scratching surfaces can be helpful too.
- **Play games with your cat.** Human companionship is a very real need for cats. 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 laser-pointer or reflective object.
- **You might consider adopting a second cat.** By having multiple cats they will provide each other with exercise, social interaction, and other forms of mental stimulation. Cats housed together have more opportunity to "be cats" and this means they are less likely to be destructive or engage in other problematic behavior.

Indoor/Outdoor Cats

In some cases, cats exhibit behavioral challenges that seem remedied only with outdoor exposure. Under those circumstances, and if outdoor time is a must... please strongly consider these options:

- **Use a Harness** (try a “Come With Me Kitty Harness & Bungee Leash”)
- **Cat-Proof Fencing** (see www.purrfectfence.com for a good example)
- **Use Special Screened Enclosures** (build your own or just search online for “outdoor cat enclosures” – you’ll be amazed at what’s out there!)

The outside world can be a dangerous place for cats, exposing them to a number of threats including:

- Predators (from dogs to wildlife)
- Automobile traffic
- Disease and parasites
- Getting lost or trapped somewhere or wandering away from home
- People who may not approve of a cat “trespassing” on their property

Likewise, free-roaming cats can pose a danger to other animals – most significantly to birds. Remember, house and domestic cats are not a natural part of the predator/prey “circle of life”. Even in small numbers, cats can have a significant affect on local bird populations.

At a minimum:

- Try not to let your cat out at night
- Be sure they’re always wearing a safety collar (Breakaway cat collars are the most safe because if your cat gets snagged they can break free)
- Make sure they have up-to-date tags and vaccinations (microchips help too!)