

When Can Kittens Go Outside?



Article checked by a vet

If you’ve recently brought home a new kitten, you may be wondering ‘when can kittens go outside?’

Kittens can go outside from 4 to 5 months old but must be vaccinated, microchipped, and neutered first. They must also be settled indoors for at least 4–6 weeks in order to build a territorial attachment.

While your kitten may be old enough, the other conditions must also be met to prevent diseases, limit roaming behaviours, and protect your kitten in the event of it getting lost.

Letting your kitten outside is a gradual process, too, and may involve taking them out on a harness before allowing them to free roam, kitten-proofing your garden, and ensuring necessary medical treatments are done before they go out.

There are several pros and cons to letting your cat outside, and you can weigh these up to see what suits you and your cat best.

How to prepare for letting your kitten outside?

Before your kitten can go outside, it's essential to prepare them for this transition slowly. We've listed some recommended steps to introduce your kitten to the outside world.

Ensure they are settled indoors first

Kittens are very territorial animals, but they require some time to develop this territorial attachment. When you first bring your kitten home, you should keep them inside for at least 4-6 weeks before letting a kitten outside. This gives them enough time to familiarise themselves with their new home and build a strong bond with you, ensuring they do return once your kitten goes outside.

Make sure your kitten is vaccinated

Before your kitten can go outside, they should have all their vaccinations. The most common vaccinations for cats help protect against the cat flu, feline infectious enteritis and feline leukaemia virus, as these are serious and potentially fatal diseases.

Kitten vaccinations start around 9 weeks old, but if they start their vaccines older than this, the second injection should usually be 4 weeks after the first. This can vary depending on the type of vaccine and the manufacturer's guidelines, so your vet will be able to advise you best on timings. Cats are only considered fully vaccinated a week after their final vaccination, therefore you should wait before letting your kitten outside. Make sure to keep up with annual boosters to continue protection.

Worm and flea treat your kitten

Once your kitten goes outside, they are at risk of catching internal and external parasites, such as cat worms and fleas. Fleas can be dangerous for kittens as they are at risk of becoming anaemic. Learn how to spot fleas early, as well as how to treat and prevent infestations. Worms, specifically roundworms and hookworms, can also be passed onto

humans, which can be particularly harmful for young children and pregnant women.

Keep your cat protected from fleas and worms with regular treatment specific to your kitten. It is best to use vet-prescribed treatment, and you should follow your vet's instructions for regular use to ensure your cat stays parasite-free.

Microchip your kitten

It's a legal requirement that you microchip your kitten before introducing them to the outside world so your kitten can be returned to you safely in case they get lost or hurt.

Your vet will implant a small chip under your cat's skin, usually around their shoulder blades. This chip will carry a unique number specific to your kitten, and when scanned, it will provide your contact details on a database so your kitten and its home can be identified.

Microchipping cats became a legal requirement in England in 2024 and is an essential step in taking care of your kitten.

Get your kitten the right collar and ID tag

There are pros and cons to using cat collars, and it's important to get the right one before you let your kitten outside. Your kitten's collar should be reflective so it's easy for motorists to see them and they stay safe after dark. It should also have a breakaway safety buckle, so if your cat's collar gets caught on anything, it will snap open and prevent a potentially serious injury.

You can also attach a tag with your cat's name and your contact details, so your kitten isn't mistaken for a stray and can be returned home to you if lost or hurt. Some people may not want their kittens to bring home dead mice and birds as unpleasant gifts, so you can add a small bell to the collar to disrupt their hunting attempts - although this can sometimes irritate your cat.

Install a cat flap

It's important if your kitten goes outside that they have access to the home so they can come and go as they please. You can install a microchip-activated cat flap, so that it only opens for your cat to avoid unwanted guests. Make sure to properly introduce your kitten to the cat flap so they get used to coming in and out this way.

Kitten-proof the garden

Once your kitten is ready to go outside, it’s important that you make your garden area safe for them. If you have an open pond, make sure to cover this to avoid your cat falling in. You should also cover pipes to deter your cat from climbing through, and ensure there are no gaps in your fences where your cat could get stuck. If you have a shed or garage with chemicals and items on shelves, keep this locked so your kitten cannot access it to prevent injury or ingestion of dangerous substances.

Antifreeze is a particularly dangerous substance for cats, as it smells attractive to them but is highly toxic to them. It must be locked in a garage or shed and in a sealed container.

Also, if you plant flowers in your garden, make sure they are non-toxic to your cat in case they take a bite. Some gardeners use slug pellets to deter slugs, but these are often highly toxic for cats. When using any gardening chemicals for your plants, make sure they are pet-safe. This is also something to be aware of if your cat travels beyond your garden to other gardens in the area.

Neutering

It is entirely up to you as a pet parent whether or not to neuter your cat, but it is generally advised to do so in order to prevent the overpopulation of stray cats and transmission of infectious diseases. Female cats are very fertile and can become pregnant as young as 4 months old. Male cats, if unneutered, are more likely to explore areas further away in pursuit of females and could also get into more fights with other male cats. Unneutered males also face a higher risk of FIV (Feline Immunodeficiency Virus) as a result of fighting. This has no vaccine or cure in the UK.

Kittens can be neutered as young as 3 months, but vets prefer to wait until 4-6 months, so it’s important to consider this before letting your kitten outside.

Consider a harness for early outdoor trips

When your kitten is just beginning to explore the outdoors, a kitten harness may be a good idea. This can prevent your kitten from travelling too far, climbing areas it may get stuck in, or sniffing and tasting things it shouldn’t.

After several supervised harness sessions, you can begin to allow your kitten to free roam.

How to introduce your kitten to the outdoors

When your kitten has reached the right age (4 to 6 months) and has been vaccinated and neutered, they are ready to go outside.

However, it’s important to know that introducing a kitten to the outdoors is a gradual process and may take time and patience.

We’ve listed some key steps cat owners can take to introduce kittens to the outside world.

1. Accompany your kitten outside at first

Once your kitten is vaccinated, microchipped and flea/worm treated, you can take them with you to your garden. More than likely, your kitten is already desperate to go outside and will be happy to see those doors open. By accompanying your kitten outside, you both will feel reassured.

2. Let them explore at their own pace

It will take your kitten some time to get used to new sensations outside, including loud noises such as a dog barking or a car driving past. Stay with your kitten as they explore, but give them enough space to slowly build their confidence.

3. Train your kitten to come in with treats

When first letting your kitten outside, you can keep the door and/or cat flap open, so your kitten can run back inside if they wish. It’s also beneficial to start training your kitten to come to you when you call their name. You can practise this by allowing them outside just before meal times, so they return when you call them for food. You could also shake a treat bag when calling their name, and give your kitten treats to encourage them to come inside.

4. Gradually let them come and go on their own

Once your kitten builds up their confidence, you can begin to increase the amount of time they spend outside. This will enable your kitten to get their bearings, become familiar with the garden and surrounding areas, and establish their territory by spreading their scent. Follow your kitten’s lead and wait until you both are ready to let your kitten outside alone.

Kittens have a lot of energy, and you might choose to burn some of this by allowing your kitten to go outside. It's essential you take precautions and introduce your kitten to the outside gradually. Supervised outdoor time can be of real benefit to a kitten until around 6 months of age. There are pros and cons to letting your cat outside, and you can weigh these up to see what suits you and your cat best

Things to know before letting your kitten go outside

Before heading outside with your kitten, there are a few important things to remember:

- Microchipping is now a legal requirement in England since June 2024 and is needed to ensure your cat's safety in the event of it being lost.
- Consider bringing your kittens indoors at dusk to keep them safe.
- Neighbouring gardens could potentially have hazards and may not be kitten-proofed like yours.
- Supervised outdoor time is advised until your kitten is 6 months old. This can also help you to observe and understand their outdoor behaviour.

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1. **What age should kittens be let outside?**

   Kittens can go outside once they are familiar with your home, which may take 4 weeks, and only if they are vaccinated, microchipped and treated to prevent fleas and worms. It is better to wait until they are neutered before letting a kitten outside, which vets recommend at 4-6 months.

2. **How to first introduce your kitten to the outside**

   Although your kitten may be desperate to go outside, it's important to begin this transition gradually until you and your kitten feel confident. When you first bring your kitten home, keep them inside for at least 4-6 weeks so they develop an attachment to you and your home, which will help ensure they return home when outside.

3. **Will my kitten run away if I let it outside?**

   Your kitten is unlikely to run away if you let them outside, as long as you have waited 4-6 weeks after bringing them home. This gives them enough time to develop an attachment to you and their new home, so they are more likely to return after exploring.

4. **What if I want to keep my kitten indoors?**

   As a pet parent, it is up to you whether your kitten goes outside or not. Some cat breeds are better suited to being indoor cats, such as Ragdolls, Siamese, Sphynx and Himalayans. Before you let your kitten outside, make sure their breed is suited to the outdoors. You may also choose to keep your kitten indoors if you live near a busy road, in a flat where your cat cannot come and go easily, or if you're worried about other local animals. It's important to understand the risks of the outdoors, including fights with other cats, increased chances of catching diseases and dangers of crossing roads.

5. **Do kittens need to be vaccinated and neutered before going outside?**

   Yes, kittens should be both vaccinated and neutered before being allowed outside. They are typically allowed out at 4 to 6 months old but must wait a week after their last vaccination before they can go outside.

   Neutering and vaccinating cats before allowing them out prevents roaming behaviours and protects them against unwanted illness and disease.

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