

PERFECT FIT.

LETTING YOUR CAT OUTSIDE VS. KEEPING HER INSIDE



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Choosing to let your cat outdoors or to keep her inside is often a momentous decision for new and even experienced cat owners. For those of you who share or have shared your lives and homes with a feline friend or two, you have probably already noticed that the indoor vs. outdoor debate tends to outrank in importance even such concerns as the merits of wet food vs. dry food, choosing the right litter for your cat (as well as the most effective for your family), or just if and when to draw the line about letting your cat sleep in your bed at night. So, whether your new family member is a young kitten or a more mature surefooted cat, chances are you will eventually grapple with what can initially seem like a daunting question: should I let my cat outside or keep her indoors? And as one good question often leads to another, you may well then ask yourself a number of related questions such as: What are the benefits of being outdoors to my cat? What are the risks of letting my cat out? Can I let my indoor cat outside? Can my cat be happy indoors? What are the advantages or drawbacks of the indoor life? Should a kitten be allowed outside? However, there is no reason to panic. With a little preparation and thought, these questions need not be overwhelming.

In fact, deciding to let your cat outside or to keep her in the house does not have to be stressful for you or your cat. To help you make an informed decision that is first and foremost best for your cat's wellbeing, and incidentally a decision you can really live with, we suggest taking a look at some of the most common issues associated with indoor vs outdoor cats.

RESPECTING YOUR CAT'S INDIVIDUAL PERSONALITY

AND NEEDS

Above all when weighing the pros and cons of the outdoor vs. the indoor life for your cat, it is important to remember two things. First, like people, every cat is different with individual personalities and different preferences, so what is best for one cat may not be right for yours. For example if you have adopted a stray cat, who has lived the roaming life, your new companion may likely be eager to go out. On the other hand, if your cat has had previously traumatic experiences with other animals perhaps she will be more than a little reluctant to venture outside again. A young kitten that has never been out of your flat, may or may not feel the pull of the outdoors. Secondly, there is no “right” or “wrong” side of the outdoor /indoor debate. Both outdoor and indoor cats can live full, satisfying, happy lives, provided you take some practical steps to make your cat’s outdoor or indoor environments as safe and stimulating as possible for your cat.

THE CALL OF THE “GREAT OUTDOORS” AND YOUR CAT

Many cats will want to go out especially once they have experienced a taste of outdoor freedom, while other cats may be timid and downright wary of venturing into an unknown environment full of unfamiliar sensory experiences. Having said this, cats tend to be curious, and are natural explorers. Cats are easily intrigued and stimulated by the myriad fascinating sights, sounds, tastes, textures and smells they may encounter outside including insects, the play of light and shadow, rodents, birds, and plants, to name a few. So if your cat seems interested in venturing out, or waits longingly at the door, it is worth considering some of the potential advantages and disadvantages of the outdoor life.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF LETTING YOUR CAT OUTSIDE?

- Outdoor cats undoubtedly have more opportunity to get physical activity through climbing, running, or exploring. Free to roam or simply explore a limited outdoor space, your cat has naturally less chance of gaining weight.
- Outdoors, your cat is totally free to engage in instinctive behavior such as scratching that you may not appreciate indoors on your furniture or brand new curtains.
- The outdoor environment offers countless opportunities for your inquisitive cat to explore wider spaces and encounter new sights, smells, tastes, textures and experiences, stimulating her natural curiosity and wellbeing...
- You can create a natural litter for your cat in a protected area of the garden, in addition to her usual indoor litter for rainy days and at night.
- She may also enjoy having her own corner of the garden planted with long grass to hide and roll in.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS OF LETTING YOUR CAT OUTSIDE?

- Cars are one of the greatest risks to your cat outdoors. Busy roads are especially dangerous but a cat may also be surprised and hurt by a car on a quiet country road.
- Cats are also at risk of hiding under the bonnet of a car.
- Your cat may wander too far and get lost. However, avoid putting a collar on her to prevent any risk of strangulation. Make your cat wearing a well-fitted ‘break-free’ safe collar with an ID disc is a good alternative option.
- Depending on where you live, other animals such as foxes, dogs, and especially other potentially aggressive rival cats are also a potential threat to your cat.
- Outdoor cats are much more exposed to contracting infectious diseases especially through fighting with other cats. Common serious diseases are Feline Leukemia,

Feline AIDS, abscesses, and upper respiratory infections, among others.

- Toxic substances such as slug pellets, anti-freeze or rat poison, are also dangerous.
- Some common garden plants and flowers such as lilies or poinsettia are toxic for your cat.
- Your cat may get trapped in someone's garage or shed.
- Outside your cat is more exposed to common parasites such as ticks and worms.



So, while there are many clear benefits to letting your cat outside including increased physical activity, natural stimulation and an outlet for instinctive cat behavior such as exploring, there are also definite risks. These include cars, other animals, diseases and parasites, toxic chemical products or plants and getting lost or trapped.

ASSESSING YOUR CAT'S POTENTIAL OUTDOOR ENVIRONMENT

It is important to think carefully about your cat's immediate outdoor environment. You should ask yourself some basic questions such as, How far am I from the closest road? Does my garden have any type of fencing likely to keep stray dogs out and dissuade although not necessarily prevent my cat from getting out? What kind of plants do I have growing in my garden? Are there any dogs living next door? What is the family schedule like? Will someone be home to let my cat in if she feels threatened or would she have to remain outside? These are all important questions to ask yourself if you are considering this important lifestyle change for your cat.

CHOOSING TO LET MY CAT OUTSIDE

Once you have weighed the benefits and drawbacks of letting your cat outside and tallied these with your home's immediate outside environment, you may decide that she should be allowed to explore the outdoor world. There are a number of practical things you can do to optimize your cat's outdoor experience and keep her healthy and safe.

TIPS ON HOW TO MINIMIZE THE RISKS FOR YOUR OUTDOOR CAT

- Ensure your cat has all proper vaccinations.
- Regularly treat your cat with flea, tick and worming medication.
- Get your cat micro-chipped. A microchip is a permanent form of identification. If your

beloved companion should get lost or wander too far from home, it will be much easier to find her if she has a microchip.

- Have your cat neutered. This should help keep her from wandering too far.
- If you do live near a road, try not to let your cat out during high traffic/rush hour times.
- Try to encourage her to come in at dusk. Cats are more at risk at night, when they can be blinded by car headlights.
- Talk with your neighbours. Check whether your cat is using your neighbor's garden to relieve herself. Make sure that your cat has both an accessible indoor litter and outdoor toilet area. Ensure that it is kept clean and in a place where your cat feels safe and not overly exposed.
- If you are not home much during the day to let your cat in or out, think about installing a cat flap. Microchip flaps are designed to prevent other cats from entering your home.
- Remove any dangerous chemical products from the garden and check with your neighbours to see what products they may be using.
- Whenever possible ensure that your garden does not have any poisonous plants your cat is likely to eat, especially if bored.
- Plant a cat-friendly garden including lavender.
- Consider creating a garden enclosure that would allow your cat outdoor time without allowing her to roam further.

SHOULD I LET MY KITTEN OUTSIDE?

If you would like to give your kitten the opportunity to explore the natural world, there are a few additional considerations to keep in mind. While you may be eager for your adorable companion to get some sunshine and fresh air, there is no need to rush the experience. From your kitten's perspective, your house or apartment offers ample opportunities for exploration (and potential mischief) and discovery, so there is little chance that she will be bored indoors in the early stages of her life. The outdoor world is indeed very large, very exciting and perhaps even a bit scary to a little kitten, so it is all the more important that you respect certain safety considerations before letting her out of your apartment or house.

TIPS ON HOW TO LET YOUR KITTEN OUTSIDE SAFELY

- Protect your kitten from infectious diseases. Do not let your kitten go outside until at least a week after she has completed her first course of vaccinations and fleas and worm treatment.
- Have your kitten microchipped before letting her out.
- Check that you have removed any sharp objects or toxic substances from the garden that your kitten is likely to walk on or ingest.
- Choose a quiet time for your cat's first venture outdoors. Check that no construction is being done nearby. Loud noises can startle a new kitten.
- Never leave a young kitten alone outside, even for a minute. Your kitty has no way of defending herself against attack from other animals.
- Always accompany your kitten outside and let her play for short periods of time, then bring her back inside.
- Stick very close to your kitten and remember that kittens can move very quickly, especially if scared.
- Whenever possible, warn your immediate neighbours that you will be taking your cat out. If they have a dog, keep an eye on your kitten when they meet

- Cover up any sources of water such as a fountain or pond to ensure your kitten does not fall in. If you have fencing, block up any holes.

LEAVING YOUR CAT INDOORS: THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Once you have considered the relative pros and cons of an outdoor environment for your cat, you may decide that it is better for her to stay in. This is a perfectly valid decision. Remember, ultimately you are the best judge of what is right for your cat given your particular living environment and her needs. However, it is best to be aware of both the advantages and disadvantages of leaving your cat inside. You will feel better about making an informed decision, and you will likely communicate this positive attitude to your cat and any other family members. Additionally, if you are aware of the potential drawbacks to an indoor cat's life, you are much more likely to implement some of the many measures which can help ensure that your cat remains happy, healthy and stimulated indoors, throughout her life.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF KEEPING YOUR CAT INDOORS?

- Your cat has less chance of contracting infectious diseases or parasites. Your cat has much less chance of getting lost or hit by a car.
- Your cat is safe from attacks by other animals and in particular from other cats.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL DRAWBACKS OF LEAVING YOUR CAT INDOORS?

- Your cat may be frustrated if she can't engage in instinctive behaviour such as fairly unlimited exploring or scratching. This frustration can stress your cat and lead to behavioural issues such as scratching up and destroying furniture, or failure to use her litter and urinating where she is not supposed to.
- Indoors, your cat tends to have less opportunities and space for physical activity and is more at risk of gaining weight. Some cats could be bored which leads to chronic inflammatory diseases such as obesity, diabetes, osteoarthritis.
- Your cat will be more dependent on you for stimulation and can find it more difficult to cope than an outdoor cat if you are away.
- It can be challenging to ensure that your cat does not get outside, especially if there are children in the house. If your cat does escape she is likely to be disoriented and frightened outside.

CREATING A SAFE, STIMULATING, HEALTHY INDOOR CAT ENVIRONMENT

There are a number of simple steps you can take to help create a positive, safe, stimulating environment for your cat. Most of these are relatively easy to set up and inexpensive. In the long-term, they will greatly improve your indoor cat's quality of life.

TIPS ON HOW TO ENRICH YOUR CAT'S INDOOR ENVIRONMENT:

- Ensure that your cat has an outlet for her instinctive need to scratch by setting up both vertical and horizontal scratching posts in different areas of the house.
- Try and make feeding more stimulating. Puzzle feeders will encourage your cat to

think, relieve boredom and give her a little added physical activity.

- Install a cat tree to give your companion the opportunity to climb.
- Create perches on window-sills where your cat may enjoy keeping an eye on what is going on outside. However, keep in mind, that she can also experience stress if she has to endure another cat outside looking in.
- Make sure that all window screens are secure and hole-free. Train the family to shut outside doors carefully.
- Even indoor cats should be micro-chipped. If your cat should escape she will be less prepared for the outdoors, and micro-chipping her will make it much easier to reunite with your cat.
- Remove any potentially toxic indoor plants and create an indoor cat friendly planter garden that your cat may enjoy exploring. Play with your cat as often as possible. There are lots of fun cat toys or have fun making your own toys.

Now, that you have gotten an overview of the main issues to consider when deciding what is best for your cat, the indoor or outdoor life, you are in a much better position to make a decision that will work in the long run for both your cat and you. Remember that this is a very personal decision intimately linked to your cat's own personality and history as well as your specific home environment. Cats can be happy and healthy whether they live indoors or outdoors as long as you pay close attention to meeting the full range of their physical, psychological and emotional needs, and take the necessary precautionary measures to keep them safe and stimulated throughout the different stages of their life.

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