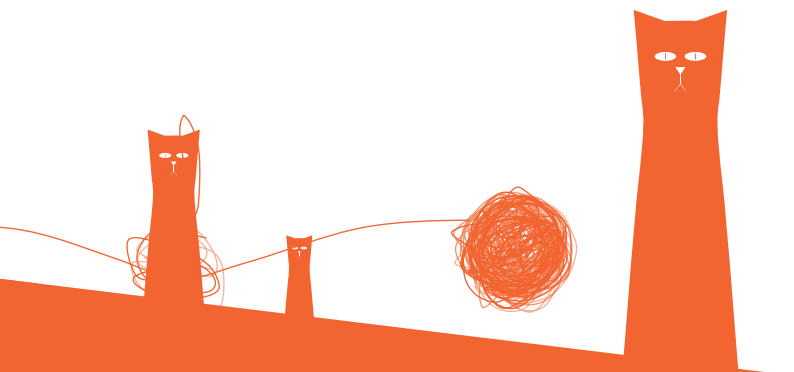


# Feline behaviour



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**ESSENTIAL GUIDES**



*There are some things your cat will do which are just instinctive. Before taking on a cat you should be sure that you are happy to live with these behavioural habits.*

## **It is only natural**

Preventing your cat from carrying out any of the natural activities below will stress and frustrate him and could lead to behavioural problems.

**Hunting** – some cats are prolific hunters while others catch nothing at all – it varies from individual to individual. Prey might be eaten or brought to you as a ‘present’ – dead or alive.

**Scratching** – cats scratch to keep their claws in good condition and to mark their territory.

**Eating grass** – some cats like to chew grass to aid digestion and to help them regurgitate hairballs that have accumulated in their stomach through grooming.

**Toileting** – a cat may prefer to go inside in a litter tray or outside in the garden. It varies between individuals. Even if your cat toilets outside, it is a good idea to keep a litter tray indoors for those moments when he is caught short!



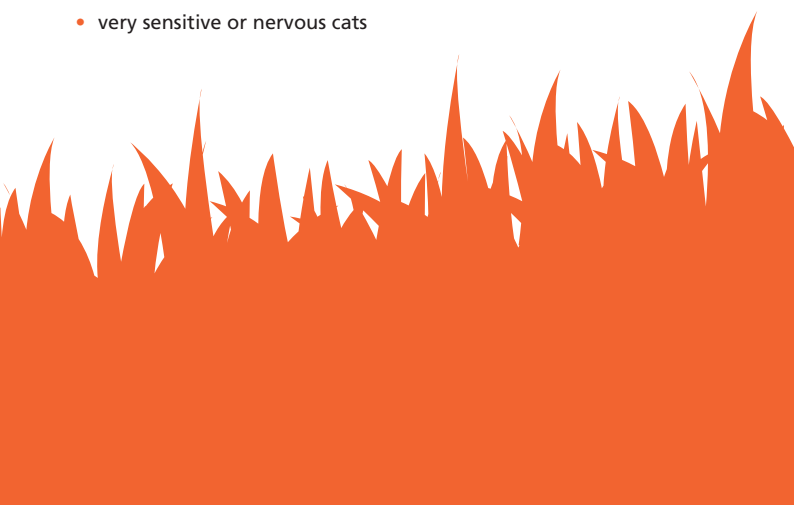
**Spraying** – cats sometimes spray short bursts of urine on vertical objects outside to mark territory and leave information for other cats to ‘read’. If your cat starts to spray inside the home then it is almost certainly a sign that all is not right in his world.

For more information see Cats Protection’s *Veterinary Guide: Spraying and scratching*.

## The indoor life

Most cats will enjoy going outside for part of the day and confining them indoors all the time can mean they become bored and frustrated.

There are a few exceptions where cats have to stay indoors, these include:

- cats with a disability (eg deaf or blind cats)
  - cats carrying infectious disease (eg FIV)
  - very sensitive or nervous cats
- 

Cats should be provided with a stimulating and safe indoor environment, whether they go outside or not. If your cat is kept indoors constantly then this is particularly essential. Bear in mind:

### **Hunting, play and exercise**

Keep your cat amused with toys, climbing towers or activity centres. These can be bought or made – a cardboard box with holes cut into it or a ball of tin foil can be perfectly adequate. Play is more fun if you get involved too. Older cats will love playing three or four times a day, while younger cats will be happy to play ten times a day or more. Create interest at meal times by hiding cat biscuits around the house for your cat to search out.

### **Scratching**

A scratching post will provide exercise, claw maintenance and a focal point for your cat to express this natural behaviour – it will protect your furniture, too. If your cat scratches your furniture you may want to read Cats Protection's *Veterinary Guide: Spraying and scratching*.

### **Eating grass**

There is a type of grass that cats particularly like called Cocksfoot. It has long broad leaves so it is easy for them to bite. If your cat cannot go outside, Cocksfoot grass can be grown indoors. Seeds are available from garden centres, pet shops and Cats Protection. If no grass is provided, your cat may try to eat other household plants (see Indoor hazards).

### **Toileting**

It is a good idea to have one litter tray per cat, plus one extra – especially if your cats are kept indoors. Cats do not like using dirty or soiled trays so this helps to prevent accidents as well as being more hygienic.

## Indoor hazards

Cats will not usually eat things that are bad for them. However, it is best to follow the rule: *if you should keep it out of reach of children, keep it out of reach of cats*. This is particularly important with indoor cats as their lack of stimulation will make them more inclined to curiosity.

Bear in mind, too, that anything that gets on to your cat's fur or feet is likely to be ingested later when he is grooming, so keep him away from areas where anti-freeze, detergents, bleaches or polishes are being used.

Some plants and cut flowers are poisonous to cats. Lilies are particularly dangerous and can cause kidney failure if eaten or even if the cat grooms himself after contact with the pollen.



# The great outdoors

Cats are free-roaming creatures and have a natural tendency to wander. It can be hard to keep them to the confines of your own garden. At the same time, it can be very annoying for neighbours to see your cat toileting in their garden.

To encourage him to use your own garden, provide him with a desirable toilet area in a secluded, sheltered spot with well-dug, fine soil. Add some used cat litter to encourage him to toilet there and dig it over regularly to keep it hygienic.

## Humane deterrents

Most cats will be deterred by:

- the smell of chicken manure, citrus peel or Silent Roar (pellets of lion dung)
- the feel of prickly plants, stone chippings or broken egg shells under their paws
- the reflections given off by half-filled plastic water bottles
- water – nearly all cats hate water so a water pistol aimed near the cat or an automatic garden spray, triggered by an infra-red detector, are good deterrents

Cats are protected by the Protection of Animals Act 1911 and so enjoy certain rights by law. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 also affords all cats, domestic and feral, legal protection. For more information see Cats Protection's

*Essential Guide: Cats and the law.*

## Fencing

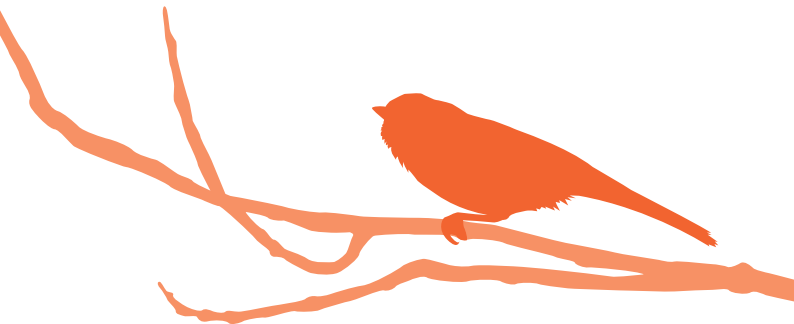
Cats can get over most fences if they really want to. However, a two-metre high, close-boarded fence with a parallel hedge will encourage your cat to remain within your garden and will show neighbours that you are doing your best to keep your cat contained.



## Cats and wildlife

Birds are an obvious prey for cats in the domestic garden, but this does not mean you cannot share your garden with both. To achieve this:

- position bird feeders and nesting boxes well out of reach of possible pouncing platforms
- place an uncomfortable surface around the base (see Humane deterrents)
- make the post of your bird table slippery; a metal post is a good option
- try to keep your cat indoors when birds are at their most active; early morning and evening



## Garden hazards

As with household chemicals, garden chemicals should be kept out of reach of cats. Some slug pellets, especially those containing metaldehyde, are extremely poisonous. Safe alternatives include Growing Success and Nemaslug.

Many garden plants are toxic to cats. Garden centres usually label plants that are harmful to humans and, as a rule, these will also be harmful to cats. Your cat is more likely to chew on plants if he is looking for grass, so provide him with a good source of Cocksfoot grass in the garden.

Plants to avoid include: all types of lily (*Lilium*), Lily of the Valley (*Convallaria majalis*), Monkshood (*Aconitum*), Spurge (*Euphorbia*) and Foxglove (*Digitalis*). For a full list of dangerous plants, phone Cats Protection's Helpline on 03000 12 12 12 or email [helpline@cats.org.uk](mailto:helpline@cats.org.uk)



# Ain't misbehaving

Cats who are nervous, aggressive or who behave in what we consider an inappropriate way (eg spraying indoors) behave that way for a reason. These 'misbehaviours' are usually signs that something, from the feline perspective at least, is very wrong. Punishing your cat for these will only make matters worse. If your cat starts to do something that is out of character you should seek advice from your vet to rule out health problems.

## Nervous or timid cats

These cats will often hide to avoid what they feel is a dangerous confrontation with humans. Reasons for nervousness can include the following:

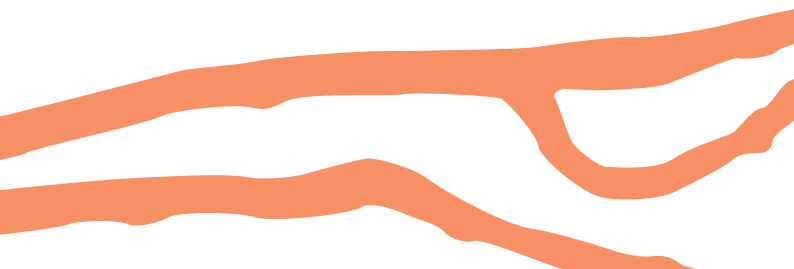
**Genetics** – some cats are naturally shyer than others

**Poor socialisation** – a lack of regular handling, particularly during their first eight weeks of life

**Bad experiences** – frightening experiences or abuse

Nervous cats need to learn that humans and noises are not always dangerous. This will take time and patience from their owners.

For more information see Cats Protection's *Veterinary Guide: Shy and timid cats*.



## Aggressive cats

Cats are rarely aggressive towards humans but they do, like all of us, have their limits.

**Defensive/fear aggression** – your cat is far more likely to run from a perceived threat but may defend himself if he cannot escape

**Play and petting aggression** – just like children, play or excitement will leave your cat in a boisterous mood, and many cats have a limit when it comes to petting

**Territorial aggression** – usually occurs when two cats meet on disputed ground

**Pain-induced aggression** – a cat suffering from pain will have drastically reduced tolerance levels

Cats may be more inclined to aggression if they:

- are kept indoors without stimulation or an outlet for their hunting instinct
- are young
- are not neutered (see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Neutering* for more information)

If your cat is aggressive, particularly if it is newly-developed aggression, seek advice from your vet immediately.



This leaflet is one of a range provided by  
Cats Protection on issues surrounding cat care.

Cats Protection is the UK's leading feline welfare  
charity and helps more than 193,000 cats and kittens  
each year. We rely entirely on public generosity to  
finance this vital welfare work.

For more information on **adopting a cat**,  
**volunteering for us** or **making a donation**,  
visit **[www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk)**



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Web: [www.cats.org.uk](http://www.cats.org.uk) EG06-2009 **CODE: 4066**

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