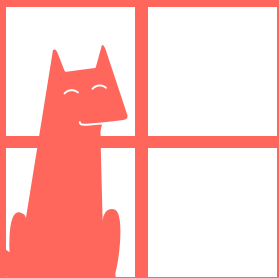


# Indoor and outdoor cats



**CATS PROTECTION**  
**ESSENTIAL GUIDE 12**

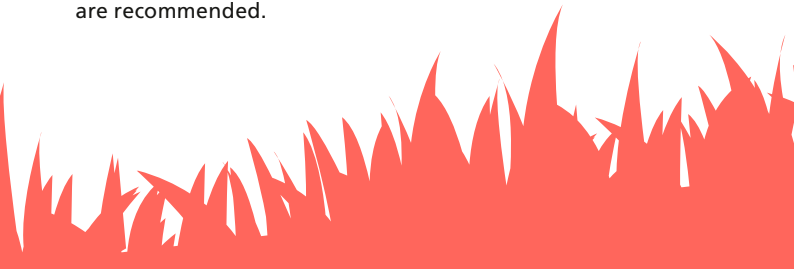


Just like people, cats are all individuals. Some cats love going outside, some barely put a paw through the cat flap and others can't go out at all, so wherever your cat spends their time, make sure they're safe and happy. This guide will help you consider what is best for your feline companion and suggest ways to ensure they enjoy a good quality of life in their home environment. Please see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Feral cats* for more guidance on feral cats.

Regardless of whether your cat lives indoors only or has access to outdoors too, Cats Protection recommends that your cat is microchipped, neutered, vaccinated and provided with flea and worming treatment. You can speak to your vet for more information and guidance about your specific cat's needs.

## The great outdoors

Ideally all cats would be allowed access to outdoors to express their natural behaviour and in the UK, the majority of people let their cats go outside. However, in built-up areas, there can be a large number of cats, each with a dwindling territory size and many people are choosing to keep their cats inside. In addition, it is recommended that some cats are kept indoors for their own benefit. Cats have a natural tendency to explore so allowing them access to the outside world gives them mental stimulation and reduces stress. If they are kept solely indoors, some additional considerations for their home are recommended.



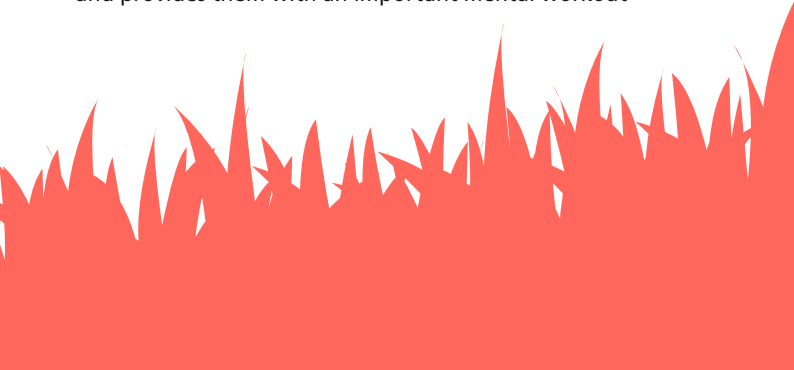
## Outdoor benefits

**Bigger territory** – allowing your cat outdoor access not only increases the space available to them, but also the variety of environment

**Natural behaviour** – cats with outdoor access are able to express their natural behaviour and can do so in a setting that is more 'acceptable' to the owner. For example, scratching and spraying are normal behaviours for cats and these traits often go unnoticed by owners of cats that have outdoor access.

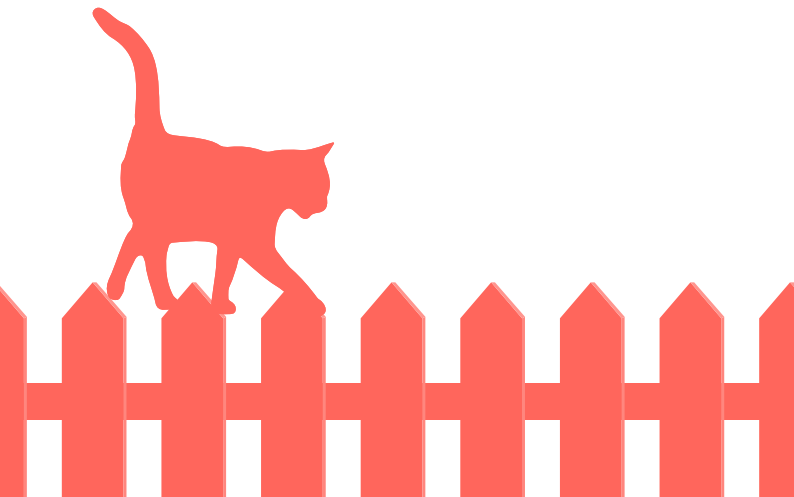
**Rodent control** – cats can help to keep unwanted rodents at bay as well as express important natural cat behaviour. The hunting sequence of stalking and catching prey actually releases endorphins or 'happy hormones' in the cat's brain. Hunting behaviour is not influenced by hunger – many cats with ample food will still want to hunt

**An interesting environment** – the outdoor environment is a complex mix of different smells, sights, sounds, tastes and textures that is constantly changing. It is particularly stimulating and interesting for the cat's extraordinary senses and provides them with an important mental workout



**Exercise** – cats with outdoor access are able to exercise more readily, either through hunting, climbing trees and fences or simply by having the extra space to utilise. Cats have great agility and engaging in a variety of different types of exercise helps to keep their muscles toned. Active cats are much less likely to become obese and suffer from associated health problems

**Enables escape from the household if necessary** – there are occasions when cats need personal space and the ability to escape from anything that they perceive as stressful, or a threat. This could include a conflict with other cats or other pets in the household, building work in the home, or unfamiliar visitors in the house. Unrestricted access to outdoors, such as via a cat flap, provides an escape route. Microchip or magnetic cat flaps can help to provide your cat with security so that neighbouring cats do not enter your house



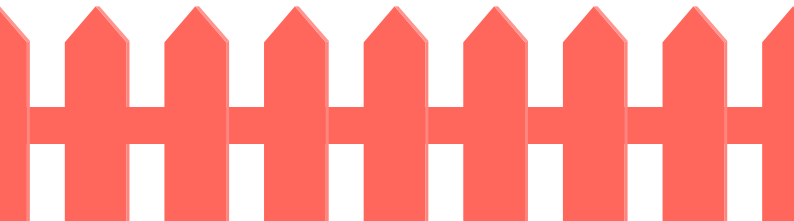
## Outdoor risks

**Injuries** – many cats are injured or killed on the road each year. Often these cats are young – under a year old – and some studies show that more road traffic injuries happen at night. It is not just busy roads that can cause cats to be injured or killed, but also quiet country roads that only have a few cars passing through which can catch a cat off guard. It is thought cats may cope better with consistently busy roads than those that are only used at rush hour

Cats can also become injured through contact with other cats, dogs and humans. Fighting can be reduced by neutering, but cat fights may still occur, often when a new cat moves into the area. Many cats sharing territories learn to 'time share' so that one will use the area in the morning and another in the afternoon

**Disease** – cats can contract infectious diseases through contact and fighting with other cats, as well as from the outdoor environment. Vaccination can protect your cat against many of these diseases

**Parasites** – cats can pick up parasites such as fleas, ticks and a variety of internal worms. Speak to your vet to find out how to prevent and treat parasites. Bear in mind indoor cats can also be susceptible if not treated regularly



**Loss** – cats can go missing for a variety of reasons, such as becoming lost, or trapped in a garden shed or garage, or sometimes having moved in with someone else. Cats are sometimes fed by people mistaking them for strays, or are handed in to animal charities. Microchipping your cat is important and helps to reunite you with your cat in the event that they ever goes missing. Speak to your vet for more information if your cat is not microchipped already. Before you let your cat outside for the first time, make sure they have fully adapted to their new home, regardless of whether they are new to you or you have recently moved house

**Outdoor poisons** – if you suspect your cat may have ingested poison, seek veterinary advice urgently – don't wait for signs of ill health as delays of even an hour can cost lives. Common poisons that cats can come into contact with include slug pellets, garden chemicals, anti-freeze and rodent control poisons, including eating poisoned prey. Outdoor chemicals should be stored out of reach. There are a number of garden plants that can be harmful or toxic to cats. Bear in mind there are also indoor chemicals and plants which can pose a risk



## Minimising the risks for an outdoor cat

Before worrying about the risks of letting your cat outdoors, remember there are many ways in which you can minimise them.

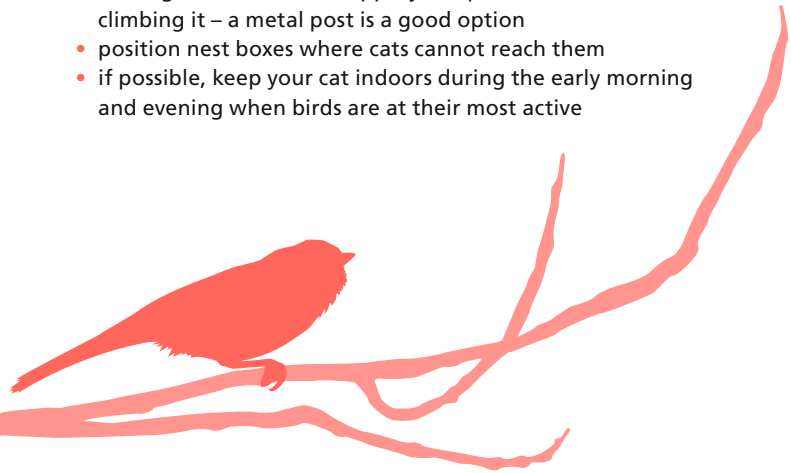
- Keep your cat indoors at night to protect them from the hazards of the roads. A reflective or fluorescent quick release collar may help get them seen, particularly in the winter months when it gets dark earlier. However, collars themselves are not without risk, so ensure it fits properly on a regular basis. Two fingers should fit snugly between the collar and the cat's neck and it should have a quick release fitting to prevent your cat becoming ensnared or getting their leg trapped. Collars with tags also do not provide a permanent means of identification
- Collar-fitted tracker devices are a popular idea to keep track of your cat, but the welfare implications must be considered – size, weight, and any risk of entrapment and/or impeding the quick release collar. Also consider how practical or useful they may be such as battery life, geographical range, how tracking data is sourced as well as the fact they are not permanent
- Have your cat microchipped – this is a permanent means of identification and will greatly increase your chance of being reunited with them should they go missing
- Ensure that your cat is neutered to reduce roaming
- Regularly treat your cat for fleas and worms and ensure they are up to date with their vaccinations. Speak to your vet for more information
- If you are concerned about your cat going outside, you could consider enclosing your garden to provide a safe area for your cat to enjoy some fresh air

## Cats and wildlife

Cats' hunting behaviour varies between individuals – some cats are prolific hunters while others catch nothing at all.

There is no evidence that cats are having an impact on the bird population, as they usually catch sick or weak birds. Here are some steps you can take to help minimise your cat preying on birds in the garden:

- you can still feed birds by using a high bird table or feeder away from any platforms which a cat could use to pounce on them. Research indicates that feeding birds can actually reduce the number caught by cats, as the more birds that are present, the more chance there is of a cat being spotted and the birds calling a warning
- placing an uncomfortable surface around the base will stop cats sitting underneath it
- making the table stand slippery will prevent cats from climbing it – a metal post is a good option
- position nest boxes where cats cannot reach them
- if possible, keep your cat indoors during the early morning and evening when birds are at their most active





## Allowing your cat to enjoy their outdoor environment

It can be hard to keep your cat to the confines of your garden, but you'll want to encourage your cat to stay close to home to keep them safe. So, is there anything you can do? Providing a cat-friendly garden may help.

## Providing an inviting toilet area

Cats like somewhere soft to bury their faeces and will be drawn to newly-dug soil, sand or gravel. To prevent them messing up your neighbour's flower beds, you could try the following:

- provide them with a litter tray in the house and/or
- provide them with their own toilet area in the garden, in a secluded, sheltered area of well-dug, fine soil. You could add some cat litter to encourage them to toilet there. Make sure it's dug over regularly so it remains hygienic and allowing the soiled material to decompose naturally. Ensure it is placed somewhere private where they feel safe

## Fencing

Cats are great climbers and jump over most fences. However, a two-metre high, close boarded fence, together with a hedge parallel to the fence, will encourage your cat to remain within your garden. Angled trellis, netting, taut wire or string could be put on top of the fence as a further deterrent, but make sure your cat cannot become ensnared or injured.

## Planting

You may want to consider dedicating a corner in your garden specifically for your cat away from your wildlife feeding or nesting areas. In this space you could plant all those 'cat-friendly' plants such as catnip (*Nepeta cataria*), mint, cat thyme (*Teucrium marum*) and lavender. A patch of longer grass can provide a soft bed and cats may also nibble on it to help cough up hairballs. Plants – without thorns – can be placed to give your cat a shady spot to lie in during those hot and sunny days while logs provide excellent outdoor scratching posts. Many cats can feel threatened in exposed spaces, so ensure your cat has plenty of hiding and resting areas in the garden.

## Other cats

If your cat is nervous about going outside, place some pot plants or other objects just outside the cat flap to provide hiding places they can use to survey the area. A magnetic or microchip cat flap can keep neighbour's cats out of your home.

For more information, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Microchipping*.

To discourage other cats from entering the garden – try clapping your hands or using a gentle water pistol. Try to discourage other cats from coming into, or overlooking your garden – sheds and walls are favoured areas – as this can be very threatening for anxious cats.



## Indoor life

Ideally all cats would be allowed access to the outdoors to express their natural behaviour. However, cats can adapt to living indoors, particularly if they are used to it from a young age. Some cats need to be confined indoors due to medical conditions and others prefer an indoor life. If they become bored they may develop behaviour problems so there are a number of ways to keep your cat happy:

### Keep them occupied...

Domestic cats that have free access to the outdoors will still often engage in hunting activity even if there is no access to prey – eg playing with fallen leaves, or grass blowing in the wind.

It is important to allow cats opportunities to exhibit hunting behaviour, as it keeps them mentally stimulated and releases feel-good hormones called endorphins. Indoor cats aren't able to play outside, so it is important to provide them with toys and activities to keep them occupied.

If you are out of the house all day, you *might* consider getting two cats. They may keep each other company and stop each other from becoming bored. However, while this set up can work well if the two cats have been brought up together, this is not a guarantee. Even some siblings may prefer not to remain together once they reach adulthood.

If you do introduce a new cat to your home, it is critical to do this slowly and carefully to avoid lifelong tension which may lead to behavioural issues and conflict. If the two cats do not

get along, it can be even more stressful for them if they are confined indoors and can never escape each other. See Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Cats living together*.

## Indoor benefits

- Your cat will be protected from loss or outdoor hazards, such as road accidents, physical attacks from other animals and outdoor poisons, if they are kept solely indoors
- Your cat may be less likely to contract parasites or infectious disease through not having direct contact with other cats or the environment used by cats or other animals
- Your cat won't hunt if kept solely indoors – assuming your house is rodent-proof – however, opportunities to play and express hunting behaviour must still be given

## Indoor risks

- If they are not allowed outdoor access, your cat may suffer from frustration if they are unable to exhibit their natural behaviour. This may lead to various behavioural issues – depending on a number of factors, including the home environment, relationship and density of other cats in the home and the character of the cat. Examples of behavioural problems include scratching furniture, spraying, over grooming, aggression, house soiling and depression
- While cats like some predictability about their environment, a static environment can be detrimental. Some indoor cats can develop fear of change, becoming sensitive to any differences within their small territory. These cats become more dependent on routine than the average cat
- Your cat will be unable to hunt if kept solely indoors and will lose this mental stimulation. It may be more difficult for a cat to adjust to life indoors if they were once a prolific hunter or enjoyed the great outdoors

- If they don't have outside access, your cat may not be able to escape from disruption such as building works, visitors or other pets in the household. While cats in multi-cat households with outdoor access can get some personal space, indoor-only cats may be stressed from living together in a restricted territory. See Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Cats living together* for further information
- Cats confined indoors are not necessarily free from the risk of stress caused by other cats in the neighbourhood. A cat that can see another feline through a window can still be stressed by the presence of the cat within its territory and develop behavioural issues
- Other hazards to be aware of:
  - **indoor hazards** – It's important to remember to keep cupboards, washing machines and tumble driers closed. Toilet lids should be kept down to avoid any risk of drowning. Balconies and windows should be safely fenced over with strong wire mesh or screens, making sure there are no gaps that your cat could fall through
  - **houseplants** – some plants and flowers – particularly lilies – can be toxic to cats. It's probably best to ensure you don't have plants that are dangerous to cats in your home, or certainly not within your cats' reach
  - **household products** – cats are very susceptible to poisoning. A number of everyday household items can pose a danger to cats and should be kept safely away – for further information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide – Keeping your cat safe*



- inactivity and obesity – indoor cats need to be provided with opportunities to exercise to avoid them getting fat or inactive which can lead to other health issues
- over-dependence – a solitary indoor cat will rely on its owner to provide stimulation, companionship and exercise and can become over-dependent
- escape – keeping windows and doors shut to prevent an indoor cat escaping can be difficult in busy households. If the cat does get out, they'll be highly stressed and disorientated as they'll have no experience of the outdoor environment. It is recommended that you microchip your cat, even if they live indoors to increase the chance of them being reunited with you if they go missing

### **Enhancing and maximising the indoor environment for all cats**

Cats should be provided with a stimulating and safe indoor environment, whether they go outside or not. If your cat is solely kept indoors, then this is particularly essential. If you have more than one cat, offer enough resources in different locations where your cats can eat, drink, toilet, rest and hide. See Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Cats living together* for further guidance.



## Feeding and drinking

Cats like to eat and drink away from their litter tray, as understandably, it's more hygienic. However, many people don't realise that cats also like to have each of their food and water bowls in separate places too. This stems back to the cat's evolutionary past, when they would eat in a different area to avoid contaminating their drinking source with the remains of their prey.

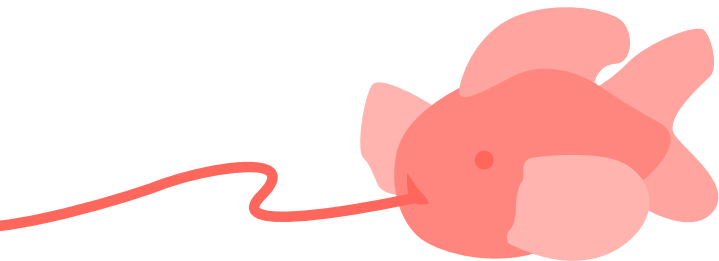
Avoid putting food and water bowls next to each other. Eating and drinking can be vulnerable activities for a cat – so try placing bowls slightly away from the wall, so that a cat can sit with their back to the wall and view their surroundings. Cats are all individuals and therefore have difference preferences for types of bowls, for example plastic, ceramic or metal bowls.

Cats in the wild spend a lot of their time on short, frequent hunting expeditions. In comparison, domestic cats are given food bowls, so it doesn't take long for them to eat their daily ration or allow them to make use of their great senses. Try using feeding puzzle balls to give part, or all, of your cat's daily ration. It is best to let cats get used to this gradually, to ensure they have enough to eat and don't become frustrated.

## 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 – you can use fishing rod toys with feathers on a string to mimic their prey! Opportunities to exhibit hunting behaviour are often triggered by toys which move and attract the cat's attention. Older cats will love playing three or four times a day, but the type of play may need to be adapted to suit their needs and level of mobility. For more information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Elderly cats*.

Younger cats will be happy to play 10 times a day or more. Very short games of one to two minutes are fine – cats use their energy in short bursts when hunting, so try to mimic this. Create interest at meal times by hiding biscuits around the house for your cat to find. Make a pyramid out of cardboard toilet roll tubes and hide food in the tubes, or use a puzzle ball. Swap toys around regularly to keep them interesting.





## Somewhere to hide

It is important to always provide your cat with an easily accessible place to hide which will help to make them feel safe and secure. A hiding place can be something as simple as a cardboard box on its side, or upside down with large holes for access. Alternatively, you could purchase an igloo style cat bed, or offer space under the bed or in a wardrobe with the door left ajar. The cat shouldn't be disturbed while they are hiding.

## Somewhere to get up high

Cats feel safer if they can view their surroundings from a height and this also increases their territory by providing extra vertical space that they can use. This is a common coping mechanism for cats that feel anxious or fearful. You could place a cosy blanket on top of a wardrobe and provide access by placing a stool or similar item next to it. Cats also love to sit on window sills and shelves. Extra consideration should be given to elderly cats. For more information see Cats Protection's *Essential Guide: Elderly cats*.

## Sleeping

On average, cats spend about 16 hours a day sleeping. Cats generally rest or sleep intermittently throughout the day and will prefer a warm, comfortable and safe place. There is a large range of cat beds available, including igloo beds, or hammocks for the radiator. A simple cardboard box with a blanket inside will also do the trick.

## Scratching and climbing

A scratching post will provide exercise, claw maintenance and a focal point for your cat to express this natural behaviour – it will help protect your furniture too. Cats like to stretch and scratch after they wake up, so try placing the scratching post near where they sleep. A good scratching post has the following features:

- a strong sturdy base so the cat can lean against the post without it wobbling
- tall enough that the cat can stretch fully
- a vertical thread that allows the cat to scratch downwards

## Eating grass

A type of grass that cats particularly like is Cocksfoot – it has long broad leaves so it is easy for them to bite. It is believed that eating grass helps cats to cough up hairballs. If your cat can't go outside, Cocksfoot grass can be grown indoors. Seeds are readily available from garden centres and pet shops. If no grass is provided, your cat may try to eat other household plants which can pose a risk.

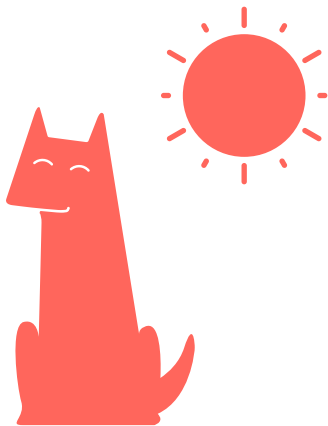
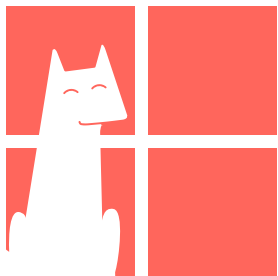
## Toileting

It is a good idea to have one litter tray per cat, plus one extra – especially if your cats are kept indoors. Place the litter trays in different quiet areas of the house, away from the food and water bowls. Cats don't like using dirty or soiled trays so make sure the litter tray is cleaned at least once a day. This helps to prevent accidents as well as being more hygienic. Cats generally prefer at least 3cm depth of litter and a litter of a sandy texture. Make any changes to the tray, the litter or its location very slowly to avoid accidents.

## Indoors or outdoor access?

Overall, the decision on whether to keep the cat inside or allow access outdoors should be assessed on the cat's personality, health, previous experience, the home and local outside environment and owner's preferences. Cats kept solely indoors should be provided with ways to exhibit their natural behaviour to ensure their welfare, reduce dependency on owners and avoid undesirable behavioural issues.

For more information, see Cats Protection's *Essential Guides: Caring for your cat*, *Understanding your cat's behaviour* and *Keeping your cat safe*



### Learn more about your cat online!

Take a look at our free interactive tool to help you understand cats' origins and their behaviour within our homes. <http://learnonline.cats.org.uk/content/ufo>

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