
BRINGING AN OUTDOOR CAT INDOORS: HOW TO MAKE THE TRANSITION

Indoor feline companions enjoy happy, healthy and very active lives in their home environment. Statistics also show that indoor cats live longer than their outdoor counterparts. Outdoor cats can easily get used to an indoor lifestyle. The transition process does, however, require a commitment on the part of all family members to insure success.

Preparation, time and patience are the three most important ingredients in making the transition from outdoors to indoors for the family feline. Cats are very much individuals, so the transition will be different depending on the animal's age, sex, activity level and general demeanor.

Neutered and spayed cats will adapt to being inside much easier than their unaltered relatives. Dealing with the sexual urges of an unaltered indoor cat could be best described as challenging. Frustrating and maddening also come to mind.

Set some guidelines at the very beginning. Decide what is going to be accepted and what is not going to be accepted from the cat. Will the cat have access to the entire house? Where is the cat going to be fed? Is the cat going to be free fed or will the cat be given specific amounts of food at certain times of the day? When will those feedings take place? Where is the litter box going to be located? Who is going to be responsible for the litter box? Where is the cat going to sleep? The transition will be much easier for the cat if you have a routine already set up before the cat actually comes inside.

When the cat first comes inside it will make life easier for everyone if the cat is confined to one room. A bathroom or utility room usually works great. The cat's food and water should be kept in the "Get Acquainted Room". This is the time and place for the cat to get used to using a litter box. If the cat has never used a litter box it will probably be advisable to use a combination of soil and litter at the very beginning. Clay litters resemble sand and may be better to mix with soil, at least initially. Members of the family should visit the cat in the get acquainted room to play and socialize with the animal. Every time someone goes into the get acquainted room they should place the cat in the litter box. Make sure the litter box is kept extremely clean. Eventually the cat will get used to using all litter with no soil mixed in.

After 2-3 days begin to open up the rest of the house to the cat. If you are going to leave the house for any length of time put the cat back in the get acquainted room. By continuing to confine the cat when you can't be there to supervise, you're taking away the temptation for the cat to use another area to urinate or defecate.

When the cat is using the litter box on a consistent basis you can move the litter box to another location if you choose. During the transition it is best to use two boxes. Keep the litter box in the get acquainted room and add a second litter box the location that you would like to keep the litter box permanently. When you first introduce the new litter box, remember to place the cat inside the litter box as often as possible. When the cat is comfortable using the second litter box, remove the first litter box from the get acquainted room. The cat will no longer need the get acquainted room.

Your new indoor cat probably loves the opportunity to look outside. Instead of having to perch on a narrow windowsill, a carpeted window seat that sits on the sill and attaches to the wall would give the cat a great vantage point. This can also become a favorite sunning and napping spot. Depending on your budget and the space available there are also other options that can keep the indoor cat in touch with what's going on outside. Greenhouse windows with carpeted shelves create a wonderful lookout. Screened-in kitty verandas give the cat a chance to be out in the fresh air and still be safe and secure.

Cats enjoy climbing, scratching and kneading. A tall, carpeted piece of cat furniture will end up serving many purposes. Many pieces are available with sisal or wood in addition to the carpet, which gives the

cat many different types of surfaces to utilize. Cats love to be up high, so undoubtedly the cat will be on the very top, most of the time, looking down on you!

Exercise is very important for the indoor cat. Different types of balls, toys, corks and empty spools of thread are simple toys that can provide endless hours of entertainment. When you can participate in the fun, try toys that will encourage the cat to chase objects to satisfy their hunting instinct. If you get tired before the cat, toss a ping-pong ball in an empty bath tub and watch the fun.

An indoor cat can still venture outside as long as it is on a harness and leash. The first step is to leave the harness on the floor for the cat to see and smell. When the cat seems comfortable with the harness, put the harness on the cat very loosely for short periods of time under your supervision. Gradually tighten the harness until it fits to the body. After a couple of days attach the leash. Give the cat gentle tugs with the leash while encouraging the cat verbally. Sometimes it also helps to have a kitty treat or two to help entice the cat to walk on the leash. When the cat is used to walking on the leash inside, start taking the cat outside in the backyard for short walks. Being on a leash and harness is not quite like being free, but it's a lot safer.

Written by Tehani Mosconi. 1993