

INDOOR / OUTDOOR

HOW TO PROVIDE THE BEST ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR CAT

The B.C. SPCA recommends that cats live indoors. Indoor cats have a longer life span than those that go outside. Whether you choose to let your cat out or keep them in, know how to provide them with the best environment to keep them happy and safe.

Risks for cats who live outdoors

- Vulnerable to injuries from fighting
- Poisoning
- Traffic accidents
- Contagious diseases and parasites
- Extreme weather
- Pet theft
- Animal cruelty
- Killed or injured by wildlife such as coyotes

Cats that roam outdoors could

- Cause problems by digging in neighbours' gardens
- Mark their territory by spraying
- Prey on songbirds and other wildlife

However, cats that are kept indoors can suffer from depression, frustration and become lethargic if their environment does not provide enough stimulation. It is important to provide an indoor environment that promotes their natural behaviours such as hiding, chasing, climbing, jumping and pouncing.

Tips to keep your cat happy, healthy and safe indoors

- Provide cat toys that are safe and stimulating such as feathered and furry toys that move and feel like small prey or toys filled with catnip (beware that catnip can make some cats aggressive or hyperactive.)
- Provide a scratching post with high perches. Put it near a doorway or window.
- Spend time every day interacting with your cat. Play with toys, games of chase and peek-a-boo.
- Clicker train your cat.
- Plant a pot of indoor greens for your cat to munch on such as cat grass from seeds (oat, rye, wheat, barley) or catnip.
- Open windows (with screens) to let fresh air in. Give your cat access to window ledges to sit on and look out at the world.
- Cats are auditory hunters. Be creative and help your indoor cat engage in natural behaviours.

Teach your cat to hunt for treats

What you will need

- Special cat treats or wet food that your cat 'loves'
- Remote doorbell
- Buzzer to replace the chime sound in the doorbell

If you're handy you can change the "chimes" for the "buzz" yourself or ask for help at the hardware store.

Step 1

- Press the doorbell button. Immediately after the buzz give your cat a treat (or a ¼ teaspoon of wet food)
- Put the treat beside the doorbell (where the buzz comes from)
- Do this step at least 5 times on day one

Tips

- If your cat is afraid of the buzzer sound, put a towel or something on it to muffle the sound. Then continue with training plan.
- Only give your cat these treats or her special wet food when you're training

Step 2

- Repeat step 1 on a couple different days over the next two weeks
- Space your training sessions out
- Don't forget to always put the treat beside the doorbell buzzer after you press the button

Your goal is for your cat to associate the buzz sound with the treat or wet food. When your cat hears the buzzer and looks to the doorbell that's when you know she's got it. She's learned the buzzer means that a treat is coming.

Step 3

Now that your cat has learned buzz = treat

- Hide the doorbell around the house
- Put a treat next to the doorbell
- Occasionally press the buzzer and watch your cat go 'hunting' for her treats

Cats are auditory hunters, so this game is fun and helps your indoor cat engage in natural behaviours.

Giving your cat access to outdoors

Should you wish to give your cat access to the outdoors, consider building a special cat enclosure or train your cat to walk on a harness and leash. Whether inside or out, your cat should always have a collar and ID tag as well as a tattoo or microchip.

Tips to help keep your cat safe outside

- Train your cat to come back at a certain time every day by feeding her only then
- Ensure your cat always has access to the inside of the house or a safe shelter near the house to escape other cats or dogs should one be chasing her.
- Train your cat to respond to a whistle by blowing the whistle every time you feed her or give her a treat. (Be careful as your cat may come running from across the street when she hears the whistle. Don't use it unless you know it is safe.)

CAUTION

Think carefully before making a decision to have an outdoor cat. Once you let your cat out, you may find it difficult to change her habit should you change your mind.

Get to know the neighbourhood and check that there are no obvious dangers. The cats most at risk of being struck by a vehicle are those that are nervous and get startled easily. Should they get spooked, they will likely run across a street without checking first. Adult cats that were previously kept indoors are also at high risk because they have not developed "street smarts."

If you let your cat out, make sure she wears a reflective collar with identification and a bell so you can hear her when you are looking for her.