

Bringing an outside cat inside... Ask a trainer

By Nan Arthur, CDBC, CPDT, KPACTP

Dear Trainer,

I'm taking a 3-year-old cat from my sister who is moving overseas with her family and can't take her cat. The cat is a spayed female and very sweet, but she has been mostly an outside cat, and I don't want her to be outside when she moves in with me. How can I make it easier for her to appreciate living inside full time?

Signed,

Feline Fancier

Dear Fancier,

How wonderful of you to take your sister's cat and want to bring her inside. The sad truth is that the average outside cat only lives about 3 years, with cars, disease and becoming prey for other animals (humans included) as some of the reasons for such a short live span.

The good news is that indoor only cats are seeing increases in their live spans—with some cats living well into their twenties!

To successfully have a cat live permanently inside, look outside—what are the things the cat would be giving up to live indoors. By examining what attracts cats to the great outdoors, you can see if there are ways to simulate some of those things inside. Here are some ideas to consider:

- Climbing—having vertical space for the cats will help them feel as though they have more territory once inside. If space allows, at least two cat trees near windows with bird feeders on the outside will give your new cat some entertainment while allowing her the adventure of climbing. Be sure to get tall climbing trees (there are many really décor-savvy trees out there in case that is a concern) so your cat can look down on the world, so to speak. This, in the cat's view, will make it feel like she has more space of her own.
- Eating grass—many cats like to go outside to munch on grass to aide their digestive system. This is an easy one as there are many options such as wheat grass, catnip and other edible plants that can be found at pet stores in growing containers; some already grown, some you can grow.
- Lots of textures to scratch—trees, fences, etc., provide cats lots of different texture to scratch and mark outside, and again, this is an easy one since there are many, many products that are available for scratching. Be sure to add both vertical and horizontal surfaces to the mix since your cat might prefer one surface to the other. Scratching surfaces come in lots of textures as well; everything from sisal rope to cardboard, so try a couple of different ones to see what your cats like.

- ❑ Lots of places to go potty—since going potty outside is often not seen, it's hard to say what types of places and textures your new cat will prefer. To ensure you minimize any problems with the litter box, add a couple to the household (you can remove extras later as you see that your cat is doing okay using her boxes). There are some great corner boxes that take little space and can be hidden by furniture or a screen if needed. The rule of thumb is to have at least one litter box per cat, + one more. Try putting some different litter types in the new boxes just to give your cat a choice of different surfaces. Then once you determine what she likes, stick to it.
- ❑ Sun bathing—this is another easy one to fulfill by placing the climbing trees near windows, or exploring window-ledge cat beds that can be purchased online or at the pet stores. These allow cats to sleep right next to the window and enjoy the sun. I have two cat beds in my garden window in my kitchen- but you will have to accept cats on the counter for this option.
- ❑ Teach your cat to walk on a leash—if you really feel like she will miss going outside. Many people take their cats for walks! There are also cat strollers that are all enclosed that you can purchase to take your kitty out for some fresh air. If you have a porch or balcony you could also build an enclosure like a “catio,” for your cat to get out into the fresh air, but not leave that area.
- ❑ Hunting— there are so many products out for cats that can mimic the “hunt.” Food carrier balls and tiny cat Kongs are two ways to have your cats work for their food. You can buy box puzzles for cats as well. They have lots of different shaped holes in a wooden box for the cat to find toys and portions of their kibble. You can also make a simple version of this by going down to your local Post Office and picking up a free Priority Mail box and cutting circles and squares on one of the big surfaces of the box, as well as on the ends. After you cut your holes, load it up with fun things for your cat to find and bat around. Be sure to make the holes big enough so your cats can't get their legs stuck. This is a favorite of one of my cats.
- ❑ Food changes and adding moisture—changing your cat's diet to one of the high-end foods can help you cats to be more calm and relaxed since these foods will not contain all the junk carbohydrates that often keep cats on edge and looking for ways to get rid of all the extra energy. You will also want to feed wet food to your cats once you bring her inside since she may be used to getting much of her daily intake of moisture from the hunted prey. Adding wet food will help to ensure that she also get a positive experience for being inside, since most cats prefer wet food. Be sure to use one of the high-end wet foods for the same reasons as the dry.
- ❑ Add a Feliway plug in—this is a pheromone product that you can find at all the pet stores, or online and it helps cats to calm down by emitting a pheromone-like scent such as the one that cats have in their cheek glands—their happy glands. This product helps take the edge off for many cats.



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By implementing these ideas your new cat should be able to make the transition pretty quickly and without much ado. Good luck and thank you for being such a good sister.

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