

Come on in: Bringing an outdoor cat inside

Introducing a friendly stray or an indoor/outdoor cat to the joys of inside living can be done with some training and planning. Here's how to do it:

LITTER BOXES

- For a former indoor/outdoor cat, a two-box system filled with fine-grain, clumping litter is ideal. Put one box where you want the litter box to permanently be, and the second at the door the cat once used to exit the house. After that habit is set up, slowly move the second box closer to the permanent box, until you can eliminate it completely.
- If a cat has never been litter boxed trained, a cattery cage or similar confinement method is the best move. Supply the cattery with a litter box, resting space, food, water and toys. When the cat is consistently using the litter box, he or she can be moved to a small room. If that works well, keep increasing the space. If the cat has an accident, return him or her to the last space he/she kept clean. Don't forget to visit the cat often and let it out for supervised playtime and socialization during the confinement period.
- Cover your potted plants with aluminum foil to ensure the cat doesn't use them as a litter box.

MAKING IT FUN

- Consider putting in a window perch or an indoor planter so the cat can nibble at feline-friendly plants such as catnip and wheat grass.
- Stock the house with plenty of toys, particularly interactive playthings. Rotate toys every week or two to keep the cat's interest.
- Offer several kinds of scratching posts, including one that's sturdy enough to climb.

MAKING THE OUTDOORS LESS FUN

- Make sure screens fit snugly in windows and can't be pushed out by kitty.
- Draw your cat away from the doorways when you enter and exit the home. Consider using tossing a toy in another direction to avert the animal's interest.
- Try a practice run: Leave the door ajar and if kitty makes a break for it, spray her with a water bottle or use some canned air. If kitty associates the outdoors with negative actions, he or she will be less likely to make a run for it.

Source: Information adapted from Jacque Lynn Schultz, CPDT