

# Why a Cat Patio Is the Next Best Thing for Your Feline

Mighty hunters at heart, cats have an inherent desire to stalk, pounce and explore, no matter what size they are or where they live. But not all kitties have the opportunity to be resourceful nomads of the veldt, ever on the lookout for prey.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

## STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Many animal experts believe that providing your cat with as much outdoor ambiance as possible will enrich their lives and make them happier and healthier
- Cat patios are screened, boxed platformed enclosures extending from a window or balcony, designed to keep cats safe while they venture out to experience the rich smells, sights and “feel” of a natural habitat
- A cat patio is like a “window to the world” for felines who love to experience natural sunlight and air movement, but with free access back into their home whenever they desire
- Keeping your own individual cats in mind is important before providing them with their own natural environment with a catio, as not all cats are the same; some are adventurous and others may be more timid
- A sturdy structure is one of the most important considerations, but your cats should be able to come and go as they please; they should always be able to get back inside whenever they want

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Cats are inherently wild creatures and hunters at heart who instinctively do what they've done from the dawn of time: No matter what size they are, from the majestic “king of beasts” to your fluffy indoor feline, they're at their best in natural surroundings and are fascinated with the outdoors.

But not all domesticated cats have a chance to wander through woods or open pasturelands to hunt for small prey or feel the breeze ruffle their fur. A number of cats live with their devoted humans in apartment buildings or in cities where an expanse of cars, concrete and construction rather than grass and trees meet their gaze through panes of glass.

In fact, the disconnect from nature and limited range of environmental stimulation can lead to boredom, stress and frustration for cats stuck indoors all day, San Francisco-based certified cat behavior consultant Mikel Delgado says, adding:

*“In the grand scheme of things, keeping cats exclusively indoors is a recent trend. We're imposing a drastic change on their natural lifestyle. Cats have physical and emotional needs, and they can get bored in an environment that isn't enriched.”<sup>1</sup>*

That's why many people who recognize their cat's inherent desire to be a mighty solitary hunter — or at least satisfy their interest in what's going on outside — have opted to give them the best of both worlds by building them a, also known as "catios," which are outdoor enclosures where their cats can be safe while experiencing the sights, sounds, smells and sensations of nature as much as possible.

Animal Planet describes a cat patio as a simple, escape-proof box, walkway or roomy, enclosed porch on a home's exterior; usually screened on all sides as well as overhead, and extending from an easily accessible window or balcony.

## What Your Cat Needs

In many respects, cats are more complex than their owners realize. If they've always been indoor cats, they'll be unaware of harmful animals and inclement weather they might encounter if they're suddenly given free, unsupervised reign outside. Whether they live in the city or in the country, there are potential hazards in each. International Cat Care observes:

*"The cat has evolved physically and behaviorally to be a specialist hunter and top of the food chain predator; motivated and driven by the sight and sound of prey. In order to be a successful hunter, the cat's natural rhythms will fit the time when its main prey of small creatures are active and vulnerable — usually at dawn and dusk."*<sup>2</sup>

Many animal experts believe that providing your cat with as much outdoor ambiance as possible will enrich their lives and make them happier and healthier. "Catios are just one option for adding more mental stimulation and enrichment to your cat's life, which we think benefits their minds and bodies," Delgado says.<sup>3</sup>

But before making or purchasing a cat patio with all the proverbial bells and whistles, taking your own individual kitty into consideration is important. Yes, most cats would be exhilarated to find themselves with access to an area within their own extended environment with sunshine (even if it's indirect sunlight), fresh air and a natural environment abounding with sights and sounds.

But not all cats are the same. Some **cats have adventurous spirits** and would spend hours at a time watching and listening, while others would feel intimidated or even terrified of the outdoors if they've lived all their lives in a quiet, uneventful atmosphere. Katenna Jones, an associate certified applied animal behaviorist in Rhode Island, says that cats who get the most use of their own private catio are typically curious and playful:

*"If you can never find your cat when you get home with groceries because she's hiding in a bag with the potato chips, or she gets into your purse all the time, or she comes up to you carrying one of your shoes in her mouth, that cat is a good candidate for a catio."*<sup>4</sup>

## How to Design and Build a Catio for Your Fine Feline

When putting together a cat patio for your furry feline, a few features are essential. Arguably the most important consideration is safety. The catio structure must be sturdy, especially if it's hanging outside a window with no other support under it such as a balcony would provide.

Another consideration is free access for your cats to come and go as they please, but it shouldn't be a replacement for supervising them; they should always be able to get back inside whenever they want.

A basic, simple but sturdy cat patio can be built as easily as a wooden frame covered with escape-proof wire. In other words, you want to keep your cat in, but you also want to keep predators out. It's simply a way for cats to go outside without exposing themselves to danger from other animals and/or traffic.

A good size for your cat patio will depend on the number of cats accessing it, but it doesn't have to take up half the space in your yard. You might want to include vertical surfaces inside, as height is more important to cats than square footage. Jones notes that cats like to observe from above, so rather than a large, flat surface, several shelves and nooks will make the space more fun, interesting and secure. As Delgado notes:

*"I've seen everything from very expensive, professionally constructed catios with drainage and plants and furniture to much more simple enclosures that are basically chicken wire on a wood frame attached to a window. As long as the catio is well-made and safe, it will work."*<sup>5</sup>

The type of cat door you design will likely be influenced by the weather. An open flap will allow your cat to move in or out easily, but be aware that both hot sun and/or cold temperatures may pose a potential threat to your cat's health and safety if for some reason they couldn't get back inside. Shade is a prerequisite, as is a comfortable spot for your cats to nap in comfort.

Food, water and a litter box are essentials, while toys and treats could be considered options, along with, possibly, a water fountain. As for other items to put inside the structure, some cat owners have provided heated beds, scratching posts, plants and even small trees.

It's always a good idea to allow your cats to gradually become accustomed to their new "digs" rather than just picking them up and plunking them down inside. I recommend allowing your cat to discover and explore the catio at his own pace, and sometimes it may take several days before he actively takes advantage of the new space. It may take weeks for them to feel altogether comfortable, safe and happy in their new space. Once they get used to it, Delgado explains:

*"Cats can sit on a perch, roll in the sun, and enjoy the sights and sounds of the outdoors in a safe way. It's an experience that they enjoy. If people want to give their cat a fuller life without letting them run loose in the streets, a catio is a good option."*<sup>6</sup>

## Sources and References

<sup>1,3,4,5,6</sup> [Pet MD 1999-2019](#)

<sup>2</sup> [International Cat Care 2017](#)

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