

Bringing Outside Cats Inside

Both dogs and cats will love you unconditionally. Dogs will do so immediately, but you have to earn a cat's trust first. To earn your cat's trust, it generally comes easily if you keep the following in mind.

IMPORTANT NOTE: IT WILL TAKE AT LEAST SEVERAL DAYS IF NOT SEVERAL WEEKS (and depending upon age, maybe several months) FOR YOUR NEW CAT OR KITTEN TO BE COMFORTABLE IN YOUR HOME. You MUST provide a "safe" hidey place for your cat and let it get used to you and its new environment!

Bringing Cats Inside

You have decided to rescue a cat or kitten, and it has lived its life, until now, outside. Your new kitty is "trapped" in a crate, a cage, a trap, or a box. Both of you are looking at each other from very different eyes. You are looking at her thinking warm, fuzzy thoughts about lap naps, purring kitties, rubbing a soft tummy and having a companion and she is looking at you with fear and distrust. Your new kitty is wondering just one thing – what in the world did she do to deserve this sudden confinement?

Outside cats coming inside need some special care. They are afraid, and it will take some time for them to come to trust you.

Cats are Territorial

Cats are not dogs! Dogs are pack animals and want to make you happy. They are motivated by social behavior. Cats are primarily territorial. They make wonderful, loving (and very entertaining!) pets, but they are primarily interested in exploring and patrolling their territory, and they are generally uninterested in making you happy. They will come to accept you and love you as a caregiver, but they generally view you as a mom or dad, and sometimes as a kitten. When outside cats move in, at first you are only a threat, and you need to go slowly with them and move slowly around them. Even when hand-raised cats move into a new home with new people (and even if you have had your cat as a pet for many years and you move into a new home), they need time to adjust to being removed from their old territory and being moved into a new one.

Start small. Keep the cat(s) confined to one room at first. The best room in the house will be one that is quiet and out of the way of general traffic – and that will be accessible once you open up the door to the rest of the home. Place the litterbox(es), if possible, in an accessible but private place in that room. Place their food and water dishes on the opposite side of the room. Create a hiding place for kitty. An upside down cardboard box with a hole cut into it will do just fine: even better if you cut a hole in the back too – that way (in her mind) she has an escape route. Put your sweaty t-shirts or sweatshirts in there to make it cozy for them (see "Cats Rely on their Sense of Smell," below). It is very kind of you to give them a safe hiding place even if you have special beds for them. Put their beds in this room too! Place a radio in the room – set it to a classical channel. Something soothing. Use soft lighting. Consider using night-lites instead of regular lighting. Put some toys in there for them. Feed them in this room for a few days on a regular schedule. It is best to leave out dry food all the time for them – make sure the bowl is full! Feed them "wet" food once or twice a day. Make sure they have plenty of fresh clean water at all times. Cats

Bringing Outside Cats Inside

dehydrate very easily when stressed. Spend as much time in there as possible – even if it is just doing something else. Reading out loud, working on the laptop, sewing, folding laundry, building a puzzle – ignore the cat(s). Getting down on the floor will help. Exercise, stretch, nap, yawn – do things they do at their level, but unconcerned with them. Let kitty watch. Let them get used to their new people and their new home.

Cats Rely on their Sense of Smell

Get kitty used to your smell(s). If you don't have a sweaty t-shirt or sweatshirt – put one on and work out! When it's good and sweaty, it's ready for your cat! Put these garments in their "hiding" box and their beds. This will help them get used to you, and they will come to associate you with safety. Put one near their food, and they will come to associate you with eating. The idea is not to just get them used to your smell, but for them to associate your smell with good things.

Outside cats sometimes need a little help learning that they need to use the litter box. If confined to one room, often they will wait until they can no longer, and they will use the litter box out of desperation. This is just fine. Sometimes, they need help. Often just a light covering of potting soil over the litter will help them feel more at home. Once they use the litter box, you can replace the soiled soil/litter mixture with just litter, but it will help if you keep some of their waste and place it in the new litter. This will reinforce that the litter box is the place to eliminate, and it will carry their smell. It should only take a day or two at most. But do keep it clean! It's just that as they're learning to use the litter box, instead of scooping EVERYTHING out, leave just a little behind. Once you are certain the new addition to your family is using the box, you should completely clean out their litter box(es) at least once a day. If you have two cats sharing one litterbox (not recommended), clean it AT LEAST twice a day. You will soon find yourself with "litterbox" problems if you don't! Cats can be very finicky. They like a clean litterbox, and they don't like change. As a matter of fact, they often get attached to their own litterbox. If you plan to get them a new one for any reason, it is best to set the new one (with litter in it) next to the old one for several days before removing the old one. You'll probably have to clean both until you remove the old one – but better than the rug.



Cats Like to Play!

The best way to play with them at first is with a toy that puts a little distance between you and kitty. NEVER USE YOUR HAND OR ANY BODY PART AS A TOY. It is very hard to "undo" this behavior, so best just not to start it. For play with new members of the family, the "wand" toys are the best. Feel free to make your own! A stick or dowel rod with a string or elastic taped to it with something to chase attached at the end is an almost endless source of fun for your cat. It also helps them feel comfortable in their new home – it gets them doing what they do best (chasing intruders out of their territory!) and this behavior helps them to feel "at home." Let them "win!" There's nothing more frustrating than not EVER catching that prey!

Bringing Outside Cats Inside

Even when kitty is comfortable with you and the new home, it's best for kitty to spend at least 10 minutes a day playing. You don't want a fat, lazy old cat!

Cats NEED To Scratch!!!

If you want to save your curtains, your furniture and your carpet from destruction, you must provide a place for your cat to scratch! They scratch to maintain their claws, to mark their territory (they have scent glands in their paws), and to provide much needed stretching to their muscles. There are many types of scratching posts. It doesn't much matter what the design is, but those made out of sisal (a kind of fibrous ropey looking material) are the best. Then they will never confuse just which carpet is and is not OK for scratching. It is also best to have some type of scratching post or board for each room in which they spend a lot of time.

If you experience problems with the cat(s) scratching where they shouldn't, there are several options. Lemon-scented air freshener sprayed on carpet, furniture or curtains will discourage unwanted clawing, scratching and climbing. Double-sided sticky tape on the furniture for a few weeks will also help if the lemon-scented spray is not enough. Cats can't stand the lemon scent, and they do not like the feel of "sticky" on their paws.

Cats Sharpen Their Claws When They Scratch

And inside cats need to have those claws clipped! The more frequently you do it, the shorter their claws will stay. If you let it go for long periods of time, even when cut, the "quick" (the blood vessel in the claw) will grow out farther and farther. We clip our cats' claws every two weeks. The first few times they did not like it one bit! Some people wrap the cats up in a blanket and expose one paw at a time. We simply did it while they were sleeping. It usually took several days to do it this way. But they eventually got used to the feel of waking up to us holding their feet. I always let them smell the clippers. And now they just sit and wait for me to finish (while awake). This is just like almost anything with pets – it is simply a matter of time.

Time Is Your Friend

Your "outside" cat that has moved indoors will make a loving pet. But it will take her some time to come to trust you. For young kittens, it may be a matter of hours. For older cats, it may be several weeks. The most important thing to remember is that for the two of you to have a successful, satisfying long term relationship, you must earn her trust. And that means working according to her schedule, not yours. It can be frustrating – but don't take it personally! Who knows what the outside cat has been subjected to. Often they have been kicked, had rocks thrown at them and have no reason to expect anything else from humans. Your love and patience will win them over, but it will take time.