

# Keeping Cats Indoors

What *you* can do to keep them *happy and healthy*

## Our unique feline companions

Cats - the most popular pet in the United States - are known for their grace, independence, and beauty. The key to enjoying cats in our lives is to understand why cats behave the way they do. By providing outlets for their natural behaviors, and reducing their exposure to threats, we can avoid problems in our homes. We have created this handout to help you do this; more information about cats' unique attributes is available on our website: [indoorpet.osu.edu/cats](http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats)

## Why cats do what they do

Outdoor cats hunt for food (hiding, pouncing), hide from predators (in concealed places or by climbing), and scent mark (often with urine) to defend their home areas. Cats hunt other animals like mice, bugs, and small birds. They hunt alone, and compete with other cats for food. These hunting habits make cats more independent than most pets, and keep them from developing the kinds of social interactions that are so common to species like humans and dogs that tend to live in groups.

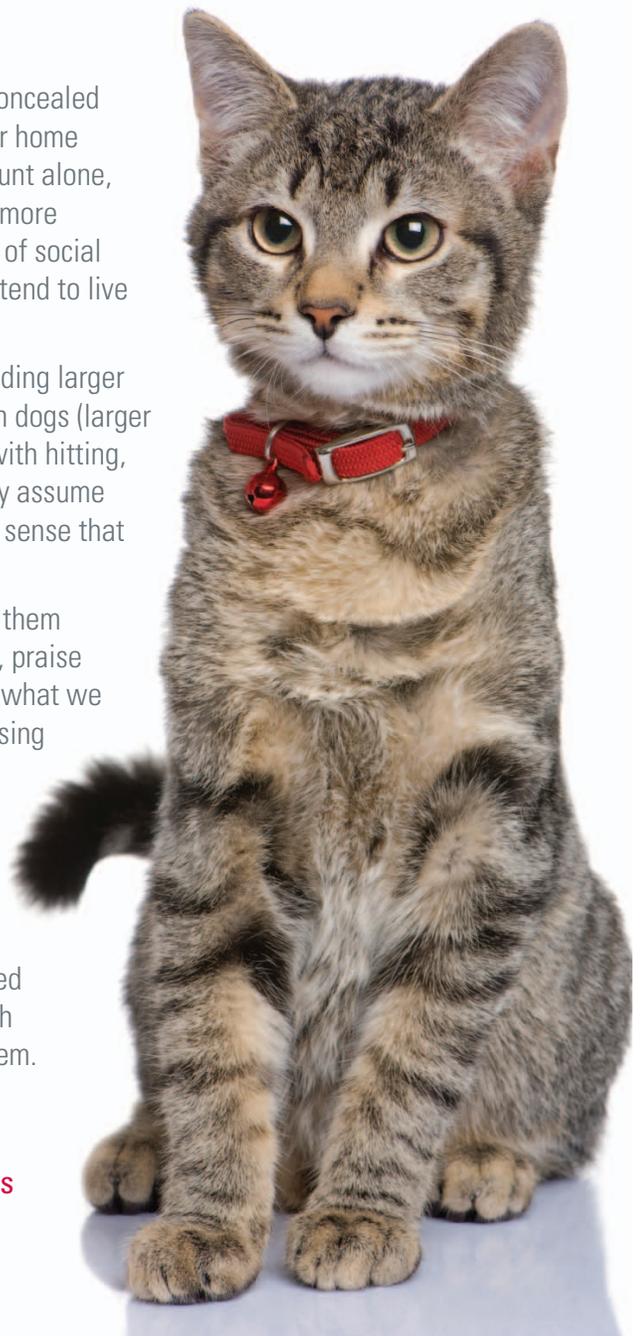
In addition to hunting outdoors, cats also are hunted by predators including larger carnivores. And because they live indoors with human beings and often dogs (larger carnivores), they may feel threatened, especially if they are punished with hitting, yelling, or "rubbing their nose in it" by a human. While we humans may assume that doing this will stop the cat from repeating its actions, the cat may sense that we are trying to kill it (like a predator)!

A better way to teach cats what to do and what not to do is to provide them with all the resources they need to do "what comes naturally" to them, praise and reward them with food treats, play, or affection whenever they do what we want them to, and let the environment tell them what is off-limits by using sticky tape, foil, citrus scent, or upside-down carpet runners in those places we don't want them to use.



We developed this resource checklist ([details on page 2](#)) to help you learn what indoor-housed cats need to enjoy their lives with you, and how you can provide them. Essential resources include:

- Informed owners
- Fresh food and water
- Litter boxes
- Scratching and climbing structures
- Safe areas for rest and relaxation
- Play opportunities



[indoorpet.osu.edu/cats](http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats)

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center  
601 Vernon L. Tharp Street Columbus, OH 43210-1089

VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER



# Keeping Cats Indoors

What you can do to keep them *happy and healthy*

## Informed owners

Our favorite books for cat owners include:

*Your Home, Their Territory* by Dr. Tony Buffington. The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center, The Indoor Pet Initiative, ISBN 978-0-615-54327-7 and [store.wexarts.org/yhtt.html](http://store.wexarts.org/yhtt.html)

*From the Cat's Point of View* by G. Bohnenkamp. ISBN: 0964460114 and [perfectpaws.com/cpv.html](http://perfectpaws.com/cpv.html)

*Cats for Dummies* (2nd ed.) by G. Spadafori. ISBN: 0764552759.

## Fresh food and water

Give each cat his own food and water bowl in a safe, quiet place. Some cats prefer dry food, others canned food; if you decide to learn more about your cat's preferences, always make changes you are OK with, then "ask the cat" to be sure she agrees. You can feed your cats from bowls or from food "puzzles," which provide more physical and mental stimulation. Some cats prefer different shaped water bowls, some prefer running water, and some may not like the taste of some water. Offering alternatives will let your cat show you what she likes. Once you learn what food and water your cat likes best, don't change without "asking" your cat first.

## Litter boxes

Cats eliminate both to empty their bowel and bladder, and to mark their territory when they feel threatened. You can help avoid elimination problems by providing an attractive litter box. There are four basic things to consider:

1. Size - litter boxes are available in a variety of sizes and shapes. Cats generally prefer large, uncovered boxes, about one and a half times the length of the cat.
2. Litter - most cats prefer fine-grained, unscented litters.
3. Location and number
  - a. Cats need quiet and privacy when using their litter box.
  - b. The litter box must be easily accessible.
  - c. The Golden Rule is "one litter box per cat, plus one," placed throughout the house out of sight of each other.
4. Cleaning – scoop daily and wash weekly with a mild, unscented dish detergent.

*Because all cats are unique, we can tell you what works for most cats, but not what will work for your cat. Please use this checklist to get started, and then have fun exploring what works best for you, your cat, and your situation. If you decide to make some changes after reviewing the checklist, start with what is easiest, and "ask" your cat by offering any new article (food, litter, etc.) next to the familiar one so your cat can tell you if he or she prefers the new one to the old one! More extensive information is available at: [indoorpet.osu.edu/cats](http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats)*



## Scratching and climbing structures

Scratching posts and climbing structures provide cats with an outlet for their natural instincts to scratch and climb, while saving your carpets and furniture. Most cats prefer scratching posts made out of rough material they can shred. Make sure scratching posts and climbing structures are sturdy enough not to move or tip over and scare your cat when used; put them in "public" parts of the house that the whole family uses. Provide several scratching and climbing opportunities in multi-cat households, located throughout the house.

## Safe areas for R and R

Cats are most vulnerable while sleeping, so they prefer to rest in areas where they feel safe and secure. You can buy a cat bed or make one from soft blankets or towels. These are just as appealing to cats and are easy to wash. Cats prefer resting areas that are elevated or allow them to fully hide their body within, in places where they feel safe and comfortable, for example a quiet bedroom or back room.

## Play opportunities

Cat play is "pretend hunting," and some cats like toys that mimic their favorite prey, like feather toys, play mice, or pieces of food rolled across the floor. If your cat isn't interested in toys, she may prefer to be brushed or petted.



[indoorpet.osu.edu/cats](http://indoorpet.osu.edu/cats)

The Ohio State University Veterinary Medical Center  
601 Vernon L. Tharp Street Columbus, OH 43210-1089

VETERINARY MEDICAL CENTER

