Tips for Happy Indoor Cats

Kittens that are kept indoors from birth usually show no desire to go outside as adults. With patience and time, outdoor pet cats can become happy indoor pets. The following tips will help:

- Play with your cat for at least 10 minutes each day.
- Provide plenty of toys for your cat to stalk, chase, and pounce on to fulfill its hunting instinct.
- Give your cat paper bags or cardboard boxes to play with when it is alone.
- Provide window shelves or high stands near windows so your cat can bask in the sun or watch birds and animals outside.
- Provide cat trees or kitty jungle gyms that your cat can climb so it can observe its surroundings from above.
- Plant kitty grass in indoor pots so your cat can graze without ingesting lawn chemicals.
- Feed your cat a balanced and nutritious diet, and make sure it always has access to clean water.
- Provide routine veterinary care, including an annual checkup and vaccinations.
- Keep the litter box clean.

Outdoor cats can kill rare species such as this piping plover chick.

An indoor cat is a safe and happy cat.

For the Sake of People, Cats, and Wildlife:

- Keep your cat indoors. It's better for the environment and better for your cat.
- *Never* abandon cats. If you are transferred and can't take your cat with you, find a good home or contact a veterinarian or local humane society for help.
- Do not feed stray cats – this only increases the cat overpopulation problem. Take stray and abandoned cats to a local shelter or call your base animal control officer for help.

Cat ownership is a responsibility, so please do your part.

Indoor Cats Can Slip Out, So Remember To:

- Spay or neuter your kitten as early as eight weeks old, *before* it can breed. Your cat will be healthier and won't contribute to the overpopulation problem.
- Ensure your cat has an ID tag attached to its collar and/or has an embedded microchip containing your contact information.

U.S. Department of Defense Natural Resources Conservation Compliance Program

For more information, please visit:

www.DoDNaturalResources.net

www.DENIX.osd.mil/NR

DoDNRConservation@bah.com

follow us on twitter @DoDNatRes

For more information on cats and the military, see www.defense.gov/specials/cats/index.html

For more information on Cats Indoors, see www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html

For information on pet adoption, contact your base veterinarian, local humane society, or see if there's a local group that can help, such as http://pactforanimals.org/military-foster-program.php

For some quick cat facts, visit http://animal.discovery.com/healthy-pets/cat-health-101

Don't Let Your Cat Go AWOL!

Indoor Cats Are Safe Cats

Cat Populations on Military Bases

Military bases struggle with how to successfully manage domestic cat populations. Frequent personnel transfers mean cats are often left behind, abandoned to fend for themselves. Lucky cats find a new home, but most are not so fortunate. Abandoned cats face many dangers including being hit by cars, starving, freezing, and catching diseases.

Base commanders must deal with how to humanely resolve the issue of too many free-roaming cats with limited available resources. Free-roaming cats kill native wildlife, including many rare and endangered species, and can also threaten the health and safety of military personnel and their families. ***As a cat owner, you are an important part of the solution.***

Cat killing a yellow-rumped warbler at a bird bath.

The Skinny on Cats

Domesticated in the Middle East over 8,000 years ago, house cats (*Felis catus)* are descendants of the Middle Eastern wild cat. European explorers and settlers first introduced these cats around the world. The Humane Society estimates the U.S. pet cat population at approximately 85 million, compared to approximately 78 million dogs. No one knows how many stray or feral cats are out there – the Humane Society estimates around 50 million.

Keeping Cats Indoors is Good for People

Stray cats often congregate around a food source, such as garbage dumps and mess halls, or where people leave food out for them. Outdoor cats are exposed to many diseases and parasites, some of which are harmful and can be transmitted to humans, including the following:

- ***Rabies*** is a deadly virus that can infect cats, wildlife, and humans. Outdoor cats are more likely to contract rabies than any other domestic animal.
- ***Cat-scratch Disease*** is a bacterial infection that cats can transmit to other cats by fleas, and to humans by a scratch or bite. While cats show no symptoms of the disease, it can cause severe illness in people. Symptoms include swollen lymph nodes, headache, fever, sore muscles and joints, fatigue, and poor appetite.
- ***Toxoplasmosis*** is an infection caused by tiny parasites found in the intestines of cats and in the tissues of many animals. People can contract this disease by not washing their hands after coming into contact with cat litter or soil contaminated with cat feces, such as in gardens and sand boxes. If contracted by a pregnant woman, the baby may develop learning, visual, and hearing disabilities.
- ***Salmonellosis*** is a bacterial infection that can cause diarrhea, fever, and stomach pain. Humans can contract this disease when they come into contact with cat feces. People can avoid infection by wearing gloves and washing their hands after cleaning out litter boxes. To prevent feline infection, keep cats indoors and feed them cooked or commercially processed food.
- Outdoor cats also can contract and transmit ***fleas, ticks, roundworm, tapeworm, and hookworm*** to humans.

Staying Indoors is Good for Cats

Many people don't realize the daily hazards that outdoor pet cats face. The average life expectancy of an outdoor, free-roaming cat is less than five years, while indoor cats commonly live 12 to 15 years. Cats that roam are in danger from:

- **Cars:** Millions of cats are run over by cars every year. In colder climates, cats may crawl into car engines to get warm, and be killed or maimed when the car is started.
- **Disease:** Outdoor cats can be exposed to several fatal diseases such as feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). Although there are vaccines for both of these diseases, not all FIV vaccinated cats will be protected because of the high number and variations of the virus strains.
- **Parasites:** Outdoor cats can suffer from debilitating parasites, such as ear mites, fleas, ticks, and worms.
- **Injuries:** Cats may experience abscesses, broken limbs, torn ears, scratched eyes, internal injuries, parasites, and death resulting from encounters with dogs, other cats, coyotes, raccoons, foxes, hawks, and owls.
- **Bad Weather:** Outdoor cats can suffer from extreme weather conditions and natural disasters, such as hurricanes, floods, fires, snow storms, and tornadoes.
- **Poisons and Traps:** The ASPCA's Animal Poison Control Center receives thousands of calls each year related to pet exposures to pesticides, rodenticides, antifreeze, and other toxic chemicals.
- **Human Cruelty:** Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for cats to be horribly abused, including being shot, stabbed, and even set on fire.

Keeping Cats Indoors is Good for Wildlife

Cats are not native to North America. Our wildlife did not evolve with this abundant and efficient predator, and thus have few defenses against it. The National Audubon Society reported that when outdoors, cats kill over 3.7 billion birds and other small animals in the U.S. every year.

- *Stray cats* are domestic animals that have been lost or abandoned by their owners.
- Truly *feral cats* are born wild and live entirely on their own without any human assistance.
- A female cat can have two to three litters per year, with four to eight kittens per litter.

Cats are not wildlife and struggle to a survive outdoors.

The Truth About Cats and Wildlife

- Even well-fed cats kill wildlife. Cats are born predators; different parts of their brain control the urge to hunt and the need to eat.
- Putting a bell on a cat's collar does not prevent it from killing because wild animals do not necessarily know that a ringing bell means danger.
- Once caught by a cat, few small animals survive. Even if the animal escapes, internal injury or infection from a cat's teeth or claws usually causes death.