

# Good Cats Play At Home



**Government  
of South Australia**

Dog and Cat  
Management Board

**2020 edition**

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Contrary to common belief, cats do not have to roam outdoors to be happy. If you keep your cat entertained by creating an interesting environment, which fulfils its physical, mental and social needs, it will be happy to stay entirely within the confines of your property.

Just as dogs must be confined to their owner's property, there is increasing demand within our community that cat owners should confine their pets within their property. For those people who believe that cats need to have time outside, the ideal solution is to provide them with an enclosed outdoor area where they can lie in the sun, have a play, watch the world go by while remaining safely at home.



Indoor cats  
are happy cats

# Indoor cats are happy cats!

Cats which have always been able to roam freely can be trained to stay entirely indoors, especially if you approach the transition as a training exercise. Rather than confining your cat 24/7 after it has been used to roaming freely, start by keeping it inside at night and gradually increase the time your cat remains safe and confined.

Cats that are allowed to roam freely outdoors will have a much shorter lifespan than cats which are safely confined by their owners. Outdoor roaming cats have an average lifespan of just 3 years compared to confined cats that can live to 15 years or more.

## Advantages

There are a number of advantages to keeping your cat confined to your property.

### Your cat is safe

Free roaming cats have an increased risk of injury and infection from cat fights, being killed or injured by cars, digesting poisons, being attacked by a dog, getting lost and a much greater risk of catching contagious diseases from other cats such as Feline Aids.

### Lower cost

By keeping your cat safely confined, you will reduce the risk of a road accident causing injury or your cat being exposed to disease. Consequently your vet bills will be fewer.

### Happy neighbours

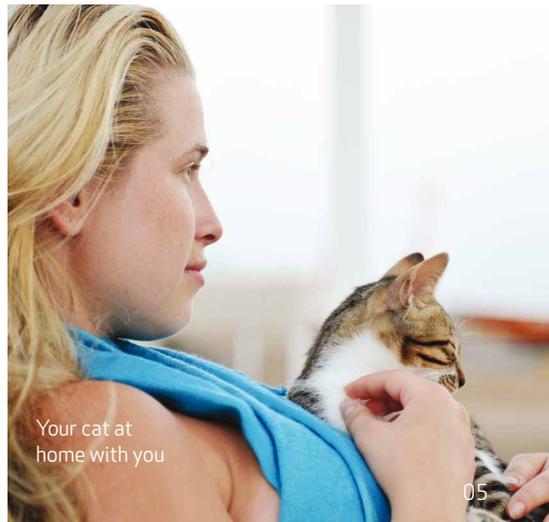
Roaming cats often cause community disputes as they wander onto neighbouring properties and spray, fight, defecate (particularly in pot plants), annoy dogs and kill wildlife.

### Protecting wildlife

Outdoor cats (even ones who are well fed) can cause considerable injury and death to wildlife as they instinctively hunt. Prey that is not killed is likely to die later from shock or infection. Scientists tell us that cats prey on more than 186 kinds of native Australian birds, 64 mammals, 87 reptiles and 10 species of amphibian and numerous invertebrates<sup>1</sup>. By confining your cat, you can have control over what it eats.

### Owners get to spend more time with their cat

Quality time with your cat – on your terms. Your cat will be there when you return from your day's activities; you will not need to wait around until the cat comes home, if it does at all.



Your cat at home with you

<sup>1</sup> Paton, D.C. (1993) Impacts of Domestic and Feral Cats on Wildlife in G Siepen and C Owens (eds) "Cat Management Workshop". Proceedings – 1993; Qld

# Be prepared

**By confining your cat before the introduction of by-laws, ensures that you won't have to create an enclosure without the time to properly consider the needs of your cat, your lifestyle and your home environment.**

There are three main ways you can confine your cat while still giving it outdoor access.

- cat-proof your fence
- a cat enclosure attached to another structure (ie house, garage or a shed)
- a free standing cat enclosure in your garden

This booklet provides examples of all three to assist you to decide the best method to confine your cat on your property.

Remember that whatever modifications you make to your fence, or if you are building a new structure, it is always advisable to check regulations and guidelines with your local council prior to starting any modifications.

Designing your new home?  
Have you considered your pet?



# Confining your cat

## Cat-proof your fence

The advantages of cat-proofing your fence are that your cat will still have free access to your whole garden, with only a minor transition to confinement needed.

The fencing modification should not have any sharp edges and there should not be any other dangerous items in the garden. Ensure you seal off all gaps in and underneath the existing fence line and gates. Unlike dogs, most cats are not prone to digging underneath fences. You may need to lock any gates that are rarely used and fit self-closing springs and latches to all other gates around the yard.

Before you start any fence alterations it is a good idea to simply watch where and how your cat gets out of your garden. It may reveal jumping points that the cat uses to clear the fence that you had not previously considered. Trees and shrubs may need to be trimmed back and any objects leaning up against the fence line removed. Larger tree trunks may need to be banded with Colourbond steel or clear polycarbonate.

## Two solutions to cat-proofing your existing fence include -

### Netting

A fence with inward-facing overhangs may discourage your cat from leaving your property. This could be in the form of a net barrier. Take care to ensure that the holes are small enough so that your cat can't get its head caught in the netting. The netting works best when it is floppy so that the cat feels unstable and unsafe if it does try to climb it. If you are DIY inclined, you could do this fencing yourself or there are companies who offer installation.

### Purpose designed addition

A second option for cat -proofing your fence is a commercial product. This involves putting 'paddles' along the top of your existing fence.

Both these systems have the added advantage of keeping other cats out of your garden.



# Confining your cat continued

## Cat enclosure attached to an existing structure

An enclosure that is attached to either your house or a garage/shed provides the cat with a lot of scope for entertainment. It will have access to its favourite spots in the house/shed, while still being able to enjoy the great outdoors.

A simple solution can be to utilise an existing area, such as a section between the house and fence or close in a veranda, patio or courtyard. This can be achieved by using a lightweight support system and covering it with netting.

Alternatively, a cat door or window opening into a commercially bought maze of tunnels and cages can also provide your cat with hours of entertainment. They are often sold as modules so you can add to your enclosure as you choose or as your budget allows. These structures can be complex or simple designs; limitations depend on individual circumstances.

There are many companies which supply these types of cat cage systems. Shop around to find what you need for your particular project. The size of your enclosure will depend on the number of cats you wish to house, and how well they behave together. An enclosure should allow at least 2 square metres of floor area for each cat and be at least 2 metres high.

## Free standing cat enclosure

If you are unable to build an enclosure attached to your house or garage/shed, there are still many suitable free - standing enclosures for you to consider. Provided that your cat has a warm comfy bed, is sheltered from the wind and rain and has shade from sun, then it will happily adapt to an enclosed space.

There are commercial free - standing enclosures available or you could design and construct your own. Designs are available on the internet for people who do want to build their own.

If you do decide to have a stand alone enclosure where your cat spends time, ensure that when you are taking your cat to and from the enclosure it cannot escape. Some people harness train their cats or use a cat carry cage for this purpose.



# Keeping your cat content

Now that you have made the decision to confine your cat, you will need to keep it entertained by providing it with lots of interesting and stimulating activities.

## Companionship

You can have a rewarding relationship with your cat by setting aside some time every day to interact with your companion. Daily play sessions with your cat can also fulfil their strong hunting and chasing instincts. Grooming is another great way to bond with your cat and can be relaxing for both of you. Cats require regular grooming to keep their skin and coats healthy, so it is time well spent.

Although most people only think about training dogs, you can also train your cat. Check websites for details and instruction videos or speak to an animal behaviourist for training procedures. Training a cat to wear a harness allows you the freedom of a walk or you can travel with your cat and still provide the exercise it requires securely.

## Toys

Toys are a great way to keep your cat entertained. There are a multitude of elaborate, commercial toys available, but items such as paper bags, boxes, ping pong or foam balls, scrunched-up paper or ribbons are often just as appealing. Maintain your cat's interest in its toys by alternating or hiding them.

### **There are some safety considerations for toys:**

- Check toys regularly for loose parts.
- Use caution with items that could be swallowed e.g. string, wool, and fake fur.
- Always cut handles off bags as cats can easily get caught in them and panic or be injured.
- Only use suspended toys under supervision.



Cats enjoy a variety of toys

# Making enclosures interesting

## High resting places

Cats love to perch up high. It allows them to survey their surroundings and makes them feel secure. A safe window ledge, tall scratching post, specially-constructed non-slip shelf or free-standing cupboard with views of the street, backyard or treetops can keep your cat interested and content for hours.

## Enclosed spaces

Cats love to hide. It allows them to get away from people and other animals. Give your cat an enclosed, private space within its enclosure. A cardboard box lined with a soft blanket, a commercial scratching tower with an enclosed platform, or an 'igloo' bed, are all great options. But often, given the chance, your cat will find its own favourite hiding spot.

## Scratching post

Scratching is normal behaviour for cats as it helps them to maintain their claws and mark their territory. It occurs most commonly after resting and during play sessions.

Scratching posts are ideal, but need to be tall enough for your cat to stretch full length whilst scratching and solid enough not to tip over.

If your cat will not use the scratching post try playing with or feeding your cat on it, spraying it with catnip, or placing it near a favourite sleeping area. Remember to reward your cat for appropriate scratching behaviour.

## Bedding

Cats like to spend a lot of time sleeping and resting in quiet areas where they feel safe and secure. Cats prefer soft, warm bedding so provide an assortment of beds in sunny spots if you can. Place some bedding up high and others low so your cat has a variety of choices.

A variety of choices will keep your cat content for hours



## Food foraging

In the wild, a cat will spend up to six hours a day hunting, stalking and consuming prey.

### **There are some simple things you can do to replicate this experience for your cat:**

- Hide dry cat biscuits around their enclosure, if you only have one cat, or a number of cats that are not competitive about food.
- Try using dry food as a training reward to teach new, or reinforce appropriate behaviour.
- Throw large dental biscuits to your cat to encourage its natural chase and capture instincts.
- Provide interactive toys, such as 'treat balls', that require your cat to manipulate the toy to gain the food.
- Try feeding them the occasional raw chicken neck or wing, which has the added benefit of being good for their teeth and gums.

## Vegetation

Most cats enjoy nibbling, sniffing and rubbing on a variety of plants, so it is a great idea to have plants in their enclosure. Cats enjoy grass seedlings, cat mint (*Nepeta mussinii*), and catnip (*Nepeta cataria*). These can be grown within your cat's enclosure in pots if that is more convenient.

### **There are a number of plants that are poisonous to cats and should be avoided. Members of the Lily family (*Lilium spp.*) are particularly toxic to cats.**

Contact your vet or search relevant websites for more information.



A relaxing space for cats and their owners

# Making enclosures interesting continued

## Additional sights and sounds

Some cats love to watch birds (you can place a bird bath/feeder outside the window or enclosure), insects (try planting flowers to attract them), fish in aquariums and even nature footage on TV.

Leaving a radio on when you go out is a simple way to provide additional enrichment/entertainment for your indoor cat.

## Company and space

Some cats enjoy the company of other cats, but careful consideration and monitored introduction are vital to developing a good relationship between cats. Ask a reputable shelter, registered breeder, or your vet for more advice before deciding to introduce another pet.

Cats prefer to have their own 'personal space' and this is particularly important to prevent aggression in group housing situations. Each cat requires his/her own area that provides all the essentials (food, water, bed, resting places, litter tray etc). So if you are thinking of getting another cat for company, first consider the available space in your enclosure to ensure your cats will not feel overcrowded which could lead to aggression problems.

## Food, water and litter trays

Ensure food and water bowls are located away from the litter tray.

Cats are very clean animals. They do not like using dirty litter trays, so trays will need to be scooped daily and cleaned with water and non-scented soap once a week. A thin layer of baking soda placed on the bottom of the tray will help absorb odours between cleanings, while the use of separation trays will assist with removal of solids.





Provide plenty of space to develop a good relationship between cats

# Become an informed owner

To become the best possible owner you should research all about cat behaviour and care for your cat. There are many useful books, websites and website forums available. Website forums enable you to find out about other peoples' experiences, what works and what to avoid. Talk to your vet about health requirements for indoor cats, including environmental enrichment ideas and diet as they will be able to provide the very latest information.

**Cats are much loved members of many Australian families, who want to 'do the right thing' by their pet. This publication provides you with some ideas on how you can confine your cat while keeping it happy, healthy and content at the same time. If you would like further information please contact your local council, vet or visit [www.goodcatsa.com](http://www.goodcatsa.com)**

**Please, encourage other cat owners to care for their cats responsibly.**



# Further information

## Websites of interest

### Cats of Australia

[www.catsofaustralia.com](http://www.catsofaustralia.com)

### Cat World

[www.cat-world.com.au](http://www.cat-world.com.au)

### GoodCatSA

[www.goodcatsa.com.au](http://www.goodcatsa.com.au)

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**GOODCAT**

**Good cats have  
responsible owners**