

Keeping Cats Indoors: Cruelty or Kindness?



by Kathy Snow

Kitten season has begun

It happens every year from April through September. The unspayed/ unneutered outdoor cats breed and give birth to thousands of litters. Hundreds of these litters will be brought to the Humane Society this summer; hundreds will be given to friends and neighbors by well-meaning but uneducated cat owners; hundreds will be sold in pet stores; and hundreds of litters of stray cats will not survive their first two months of life, but will die of disease or starvation.

The statistics are indeed grim for many felines.

The Humane Society's solutions to

the problem have been covered in previous issues of *The Humane Society News* and are straightforward: have your cat spayed or neutered, provide it with proper veterinary care, provide it with an ID tag, give it lots of love and keep it safely indoors. The answers to our suggestions are frequently, "Yes, yes, yes, yes and NO."

It is difficult for many cat owners to believe their beloved feline friends can live happily indoors. "My cat would be neurotic"; "My cat loves the back yard"; "It's cruel to keep cats inside": the reasons for allowing cats outdoors are numerous.

But before you open your back door and let your friend outside, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is it kind to expose my cat to feline diseases in the community?

- Is it kind to risk losing my cat to a car, another animal or to a cruel person?
- Is it kind to allow my cat to wander into other people's yards and gardens? Would I allow my dog the same unsupervised freedom?


We may imagine our cats happily playing in the yard or dozing in the sun, and yet most cat owners live in highly urbanized areas. We have domesticated cats and brought them to live with us in Silicon Valley. We must also be prepared to protect them. And while it is possible for an outdoor cat to live a full, long life, the odds are against it.

Once you have made the decision to keep your cats safely indoors, you can keep them happy and satisfied with just a little extra effort.

- Provide your cat with a variety of toys, a large scratching post or branch, and set aside enough time each day for a regular play period. "Neurotic" indoor cats are usually just bored. Play periods are good energy releasers and will bring you and your pet closer together.

- Provide a resting place (a carpeted shelf or ledge) near a screened window. Your cat will enjoy the fresh air and the view. Cats seem as content to sit in front of the window as humans are to sit before the television.

- Don't feel guilty! You are doing your cat a favor by giving it the protection it deserves. Cats can adjust to indoor life and remain happy, content and safe for years.

For more information, *The Indoor Cat* by Patricia Curtis (Putnam, 1981) is a good source. Ms. Curtis discusses many of the concerns of cat owners and gives practical advice on health and behavioral problems. 

KEEP CATS INDOORS!

CATS MAY LOVE TO GO OUTSIDE, BUT FOR THEIR OWN GOOD, KEEP THEM IN. ALTHOUGH CATS ARE SMART, ALERT, AND ADROIT, THEY ARE NO MATCH FOR THE MANY PERILS THAT AWAIT THEM OUTSIDE. THAT'S WHY THE AVERAGE INDOORS-ONLY CAT LIVES UP TO THREE TIMES LONGER THAN A CAT WHO GOES OUTSIDE. CONSIDER THESE THREATS:



***DISEASE** - Feline Leukemia & Feline Immunodeficiency Virus are only two of the diseases that are passed from cat to cat, and once contracted, result in the eventual death of the cat. And outside cats are even more likely than dogs to come in contact with rabid wild animals.

***PARASITES** - Outdoor cats suffer from fleas, ticks, ear mites, and worms that indoor cats are not generally exposed to.

***POISONING** - Poisons can be found in lawn chemicals, bait left out to kill rodents, auto antifreeze, and other sources.

***OTHER ANIMALS** - Fights with other cats, dogs, and wildlife often leave cats maimed or injured. And it's not just the Toms. Female cats get into fights, too, because cats are, by nature, very territorial.

***CRUEL PEOPLE** - Cats are often the victims of burning, tarring, & feathering, and other tortures. Animal dealers may collect outside cats for sale to research facilities. Outside pets are at the mercy of the people they encounter.

***TRAPS** - It's estimated that 100,000 cats are caught in traps each year. Those who aren't killed may suffer for days before being released and often lose limbs from their injuries.

***TRAFFIC** - Most outdoor cats die prematurely from car accidents. It's a myth that cats are "streetwise" about cars. No matter how alert, a cat is no match for a fast-moving vehicle.

***FOXTAILS** ("stickers") - These seemingly harmless stickers that get stuck in your socks can also get stuck in your cat's eyes, ears, mouth, and nostrils. It often requires surgery to remove these "weeds" from the cat. The foxtail so closely resembles tissue that the vet is often unable to remove all of the foreign material, which can cause the wound to abscess. This surgery can run well over \$100!

The garage is no place for a cat or to keep their litter box in. When the big door opens it is usually terrifying to a cat and will make them run away. The warm engine compartment of a car attracts cats but when the engine starts horrible things can happen to a cat under the hood. Antifreezes and other chemicals from the garage can poison a cat. The garage in the summer, when closed can get very hot and can cause dehydration and death. A cat can also get run over in the garage. **YOU WOULDN'T PUT YOUR CAR IN THE HOUSE--DON'T PUT YOUR CAT IN THE GARAGE!**

***PET OVERPOPULATION** - Unaltered cats allowed to roam and mate will account for millions of the cats that must be euthanized each year because there aren't enough homes for them. Allowing unaltered animals outside is irresponsible and at the root of the terrible pet overpopulation problem.

Cats can be completely happy inside if you provide them with toys, good care, and most importantly, lots of love and attention. If you've got a kitten, start it out right by never letting him or her outside. Older cats who are used to the "great outdoors" can make the transition to being indoor cats with time and attention.