

Keeping Cats Content in Catio

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Outdoor Catio, or cat enclosures, make it easy to keep your cat on your property & to protect it from dangers including: vehicles, dogs, other cats, disease, poisons & cruelty.

Contrary to what some people believe, cats make good indoor pets & do not need to roam the neighbourhood to experience good health.

Here are 10 easy ways to ensure that your cat likes & uses his new home extension...

Your new outdoor Catio should aim to provide your cat with:

1. A feeling of security



The material used to build your Catio must be resistant to the elements, easy to maintain, strong enough to support the weight of climbing cats, & secure enough to prevent the entry of other cats & dogs & possibly people.

Your new outdoor Catio should be as tall & wide as possible. Consulting with an expert Catio builder will help you decide how best to use your outdoor space. With a bit of creativity, Catio's can look great & become a real talking point for visitors!

2. Free access to the outdoors



Ideally, your Catio should be connected to your house in some way to allow your cat to decide if, and when, it goes outside. Entry to the Catio may be through a window, sliding door or dog-door. While free-standing Catio's are cheaper than custom-builds, they require the owner to decide when the cat goes in & out of the house. Putting your cat outside when it doesn't suit him may cause stress & lead to changes in behaviour (e.g. inappropriate toileting & vocalization) or cause infections over a longer period (e.g. urinary tract infections). Your cat should see the new Catio as a

safe place that he wants to visit – careful placement of an entrance point will allow him to be the master of his movements!

3. A view of the outside world



Cats are curious creatures & like to watch the world go by from a safe location. Catos should allow your cat to have a view of an area where there is some activity that they can spy on from a safe distance (e.g. flower garden, swimming pool area, bird bath, front driveway/roadway). The cat's strongest senses are its eyesight & hearing so building a Catio with four solid walls or using soundproof material is not recommended.

4. A hidey-hole & scratching post



Spying on the world requires stealth!! Cats like to decide when they are seen by people/other animals & when they remain an enigma. Hiding in a safe space helps cats feel secure, especially when napping outdoors. Provide your cat with a box that he can peek out of, or hide in, depending on his mood...



Scratching is a natural behaviour for cats & a Catio is a much more suitable place for your cat to sharpen his claws than indoors on your furniture! A heavy piece of natural wood that does not wobble when scratched is a perfect addition to a Catio. A cat scratching post (also called a 'cat tower') is also suitable as long as it is extremely stable & tall enough to allow your cat to stretch-out his back while scratching. Pieces of carpet are an excellent cheap scratching surface & are easy to replace when destroyed.

5. Vertical levels



Catos with several shelves at different heights allow your cat to choose the level at which he watches the world go by. Providing multiple levels makes even small Catio spaces more interesting for your cat. Arranging the shelves so that cats can easily 'step' from one level to another is particularly important for older cats who may find jumping harder.

While the majority of cats like viewing activity from a height, your cat may be one of the few that prefers to keep his paws safely on the ground (hopefully you know what type of preference your cat has before you build a Catio). If this is the case, then providing him with a view, a hidey hole & bushes/plants to peek through at his leisure will keep him happy. Catos with more floor space than height are perfect for ground-dwelling cats.

6. A sunbathing area & covered area



The domestic cat's ancestor evolved in a desert climate so our cats still like to lie in direct sun & get piping hot (which boosts their metabolism)!

When designing your Catio, try to keep in mind where sun will enter & provide your cat with a flat physical space on which he can spread out under the sun (e.g. shelf or paving block). If your cat cannot return to the house when there is bad weather then ensure your Catio also has a section with a solid roof.

7. Cat-friendly plants



Just as if they were living 'in the wild', cats will rub their faces & bodies against plants to mark their territory, investigate the soil for smells & insects, & will hide amongst the foliage on hot days or when they do not wish to be seen. The more plants you can include in your Catio the better. Be aware that although cats are carnivores they will, on occasion, eat plants to balance indigestion & to dislodge furballs & parasites from their intestines. Some plants are also eaten for their water content. Unfortunately, cats are not always able to

taste the toxins in plants that may poison them & cause death. Consult the internet or your local garden centre for help in choosing suitable plants for your Catio.

8. Cat-friendly ground cover & a litter-tray



Cats have extremely sensitive feet & they can be fussy about the ground they walk on & the litter type they prefer to bury their waste under. Good options for ground cover in Caticos include grass (if you can maintain it), wooden planks, tiles, paving stones or sections of carpet. Some cats may tolerate wood chips of small size but sawdust & mulch should be avoided. Sand can be used but may lead to a trail inside your home...

Once you install your Catio you may find that your cat prefers to go to the toilet outside! Provide a large litter tray with high sides or a children's sandpit in the Catio. Place it as far away from the main area of activity as possible – cats do not like to sleep or eat near their waste. Again, cats can be fussy about the substrate they bury their waste under, so experiment with litter type. Older cats with arthritic feet may prefer softer/finer litter types. Waste should be removed from litter trays on a daily basis to prevent bad odours from dominating the Catio & home.

9. A food & water station



Whilst it is not necessary to feed your cat when it is in the Catio, having a snack spot will certainly encourage him to visit. Ceramic bowls are preferred for outdoor use as they do not grow algae & bacteria at the same rate as plastic or stainless-steel bowls. Cats are also more likely to drink water after sunning themselves outside, so a water source is recommended. If you do not have space in your Catio for food & water then ensure that your cat can easily access these resources indoors. Keep in mind that leaving uneaten food outside may attract pests like mice & water may attract reptiles. Food & water should be regularly checked & removed when the Catio is not in use.

10. A Catio that smells like home



Cats are sensitive to smell & do not like harsh chemicals such as bleach or natural products such as eucalyptus/tea tree oils or citrus-derivatives. Use of such products may deter your cat from using the Catio. It is really important that your cat can smell his personal scent all over his new outdoor playground – removing his scent causes stress & he may redouble his efforts to re-scent the Catio by spraying urine on surfaces. Use only gentle, non-toxic dishwashing liquid to clean food bowls & litter trays on a daily basis. Hot water should be adequate for cleaning any other surface in your Catio (e.g. scratching post, hidey-hole or sunning spot).

Thank you for bringing your cat indoors.

You can both sleep soundly knowing your cat is safe & content inside his new Catio!!

