

PATIOS & FENCES

Creating Safe Outdoor Spaces for Your Cat

Patio Enclosures

Patio enclosures are only an option for people who live in a house with a yard. If you rent the house you live in, you may think it's not worth the trouble and expense to make an "addition," but some of these products may work as a non-permanent addition or if you're really handy, you might be able to modify them to make them easily removable to give your cat a special safe patio of her own.

There are options for those without a house, too. You may not have a patio because you are an apartment-dweller, but that doesn't mean your cat can't have her own window patio! These units fit into your window like an air conditioner and give your cat a space to watch the world go by (at the end of this section there is a list of companies that make patio enclosures and some make window patios, too).

There are different ways to make a cat enclosure. Depending on the weather where you live, it can be fairly easy to build an enclosed patio or deck for your cat or to alter an existing patio to make it cat-safe. You can do it yourself with your own materials, you can use a ready-made kit (see C&D Pet Products information at the end of this section), or if you're in a financial position to permit it, you can hire someone do the work and build you a screened porch. For cold weather climates, there are pre-fabricated screened porches that have glass inserts to exchange for the screens in winter. If you're handy, you can build an outdoor cat pen sort of like a rabbit hutch: a simple wood-framed structure built against a wall of your house or garage, with wire mesh attached on the outside of the wooden frame that forms the outside wall of the enclosure.

Where to put the cat patio? The location of a cat patio depends on your local weather. People who live in northern climates will want to situate a cat patio facing south for the maximum sun and warmth, as well as the most days the patio will be comfortable for cats. People who live in hot climates will want to do just the opposite; to avoid exposing their cats to additional heat from the sun, they should choose a north-facing part of the house, preferably with some natural shade from trees or the house itself.

Cat enclosures need shelves. Cats like to get up high, so to make the cat patio user-friendly, you'll want to make shelves and platforms. This will allow your cat to jump up and look out, or if you have multiple cats, the shelves will give them places where they can get away from each other. By including shelves, you maximize the cat's ability to use the space and it also means the patio doesn't have to be especially deep because the cats can enjoy the world from those perches.

It's nice to provide ramps to get up to those platforms. Shelves and high perches in the enclosure will be even more appealing to your cat if there is a fun way for her to get up there. Use tree branches, logs, or wooden planks to link the shelves with each other or the ground. Climbing is a natural part of your cat's repertoire, so you will double her pleasure by giving her climbing surfaces, too.

Install some "High Definition Cat TV", too! The only thing more fun for a cat than his very own outdoor space, is having a bird feeder right outside it where he can watch his fine-feathered friends come and go. The Knox County Humane Society in Maine refers to the bird feeders outside their volunteer-built cat patios as "cat TV's" and they call the tropical fish tank (well-covered) inside another of their indoor/outdoor cat pens as "kitty internet."

Don't shut yourself out! Don't forget to include some sort of entrance for yourself onto the patio so you can clean and repair whenever necessary. A cat flap that leads from your house directly out onto the cat patio makes life a lot simpler when space is limited because you don't have to provide a fresh water bowl and litter box out in the enclosure. You will need to include those items if the cat has no access from the patio right back into the house and it would be nice to put water and a fresh litter-box on the patio for the cat's convenience – although always at separate ends of the space.

An outdoor patio is also a great place to grow kitty grass in clay pots so that the cat can just help herself when she's in the mood.

Runs & Fences

Adding a Cat Fence Topper

If your yard is already fenced, you can add a "topper" of plastic mesh that is designed to keep cats from getting out over the top. You attach poles with metal brackets to an existing fence from which plastic mesh extends from one pole to the next, angled in from the top of the fence. To get a mental picture of it, think of prison movies you have seen and the barbed-wire "wall-topper" that extends over the prison grounds to keep anyone from going up and over. While the intention of "keeping the inmates IN" is similar in both situations, obviously the plastic mesh cat fence isn't quite so intimidating as the prison barbed wire!

Several companies (see the end of this section) sell the components you will need to install these kitty barriers, which is apparently quite easy to do. They say all you need is a ladder, a screwdriver and a drill. However, whether you are handy or handyman-challenged (like me), before you can consider whether the cat fence is an option good for you, you must already have a strong, secure, tall fence, either chain link or wood, from which the poles and mesh will extend, or you must be willing to build one.

If you do have a sturdy fence around your property, you should walk every inch of it from a cat's point of view to see where a cat might be able to escape: holes underneath fencing that a cat could squeeze through, rotting or broken areas of a wood fence, a gate with posts far enough apart that a cat could squeeze through. Repair and block any potential escape routes before you install the cat fencing so that you won't have to worry that you have invested in overhead security, but that there might be a "leak" down at ground level.

The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) in Washington, D.C. has compiled a list of companies that sell specialty cat fences, enclosures and runs. The HSUS does not endorse these companies, but they have done us all a favor by creating this list, which ultimately keeps cats out of harm's way while giving them a good quality of life.

WHERE TO FIND CAT FENCES & RUNS

Cat Fence-In (888-738-9099) www.catfencein.com

Affordable Cat Fence www.catfence.com

C&D Pet Products Cat Enclosure Kit (888-554-7887) www.cdpets.com

Just 4 Cats Outdoor Safety Enclosure Plans www.just4cats.com

Katwalks www.katwalks.com

The Kitty View (877-548-8988) www.kittyview.com

Purr-fect Fence (888-280-4066) www.purrfectfence.com

Do-It-Yourself Cat Fence (from Alley Cat Allies) www.feralcat.com