

Creating a Fun and Safe Outdoor Space for Your Cats

Not long ago, no one had heard of “catios.” It’s a new idea that is catching on quickly with people who want to take the best care of their cat companions and protect them from harm. It’s also catching on with nature enthusiasts, who are aware of recent research demonstrating that cats kill significant numbers of wild animals, including birds.

Here are a few suggestions that cat lovers have found keep their cats happy and healthy in a catio, and keep their humans worry-free. And . . . keep good neighbor relations when your cat doesn’t kill the birds they feed or use their garden as a personal litter box.

- 🐾 Warmth can be as important as fresh air in a catio. Be sure there is some direct sunlight during the day, shade in case it’s too hot in the sun, and a spot that’s protected from wind.
- 🐾 Wildlife watching is entertaining for cats as well as humans. By placing your cat’s catio in an area with squirrel trees or bird feeders, they can watch their own movie while enjoying the outdoors.
- 🐾 Cats instinctually chew on grass, just like other domestic and wild carnivores. They will appreciate some fresh green grass to munch in the catio. It can be grown in a pot or planter, or simply as a natural floor of lawn. Yum.
- 🐾 Like grass, water is an amenity that will go a long way toward making your cat feel comfortable and at home in the safe outdoors. Avoid feeding in the catio, though, as pet food attracts pests.
- 🐾 If you’re going small, remember that cats like to explore vertical spaces. Two or three different levels are likely to be more fun and stimulating, though even a window-box style can provide the sights, sounds and smells of the natural world to a lucky cat.
- 🐾 Most catios are enclosed with wire fencing of some sort. If you plan to share the space with your cats, consider purchasing black wire mesh, or painting gray or white mesh black. The mind plays a trick with dark screening and it almost disappears, where gray or white jumps out visually and clouds a clear view of the environment.
- 🐾 Here in Humboldt County, we can expect many days of rain in winter. Your cat will be happy if it can stay dry while enjoying the outdoors! This miracle can be accomplished by providing a clear roof on the catio. Clear polycarbonate panels or plexiglass will keep kitty dry while allowing sunlight through to illuminate favorite perches.
- 🐾 The floor of your catio can be just about anything: outdoor carpet, grass, paving stones, wooden decking, concrete, or whatever works for you and your cat.
- 🐾 Sometimes it can help to tape the cat-door open for a few days until your cat gets used to the idea of entering, and returning from, the new catio. This is especially true if it hasn’t used a cat-door previously.

One last note: young cats tend to take to catio living enthusiastically, spending hours at a time in “their” outdoor playground. However, it’s not always a quick adjustment for an adult cat that has spent its life outdoors. Some special treats, such as favorite snacks or cuddly time with you in the catio, can help kitty embrace the catio life.