

Cat lovers who want their cats to enjoy fresh air, sunshine, and the ambience of trees, bushes, and plants, often feel guilt by confining their cats to the indoors. This was the mindset in my generation, that cats are free and independent creatures, and should not be confined. That they can not be healthy, happy, and active, if not allowed to experience all the glories of the outdoors.

There are some safe compromises to offer your indoor cat the best of both worlds, without the potential hazards of free roaming outdoors.

Carrying Your Cat

Gary Loewenthal, former Host for the About Cats forum used to carry his cat, Mike around their back yard, allowing him to sniff and explore at will.

Mike's nose led Gary on their walk, and each outdoor expedition was a bit different than the last. These explorations are best kept to a very short time - 10 or 15 minutes - as most cats will become too eager to jump down and explore on their own. I'd suggest starting with just a minute or two for a timid cat who has never had an outdoor experience. However, carrying your cat is a great way to accustom him to the initially scary world of the outdoors, and a good preface to the next step:

Leash Training

Any cat can be trained to a harness and leash, using a gradual method of training. Many cats will initially feel confined by the additional weight of the harness, and their first attempts at walking on a leash will appear to be more of the "slinking" or "belly-crawling" variety. However, given time and patience on the part of the trainer, most cats will enjoy leash walking. Basic training instructions can be found in "How to [Train Your Cat to Walk With a Leash](#)".

Your cat may prefer to just "lie around" outdoors on his leash, as does our Jaspurr (pictured above), who is a beginner in "leash etiquette." Although Jaspurr is at the "belly-walking" stage, he eventually will progress to walking with us. It's all a matter of time and patience.

Please note that tying a cat outside on a leash is not a substitute for personal interaction and supervision. Cats should never be left alone outdoors on a leash or a rope extension. There is too much danger of their becoming tangled up, with the possibility of choking.

Sturdy harness or walking jackets are recommended, as opposed to a collar. Collars can be slipped too easily, which will most likely happen at times of danger, as when meeting a strange dog or cat on the street. Also try to buy as lightweight a leash as possible, consistent with safety. The additional "drag" of a bulky leash will slow your cat's walking progress.

A Personal Carrier

A personal vest-style carrier, they comfortably holds your cat safely with a drawstring adjustment and a metal clip that attaches to his harness.

Global Pet Products manufactures a lot of products, like a car seat for safe travel in the back seat.

Outdoor Enclosures

For cats who would prefer to "free-roam" (within limits), outdoor enclosures are ideal. They can be built from scratch, with your own or purchased plans, or assembled as modular enclosures. [Kittywalk](#) makes a whole series of lightweight containment modules, including a Kabana, a Penthouse, and a Climber.

[Feline Funhouses](#) provide a roomy enclosure suitable for patio, balcony, or deck, using black nylon mesh netting for fresh air, sunshine and view.

Your experiences may vary with any or all of these means of providing a safe outdoor experience for your cats, but I think you've been given enough alternatives here to get you started. Your feedback, as always, is appreciated.