

Roam to home

Making your roaming cat a home cat

Step 2 | Reduce their roaming



Reducing your cat's roaming is a best done as a gradual process. By making slow, incremental changes, you'll reduce any stress on your cat and increase your chance of success. Here are some ways you can reduce your cat's roaming and prepare them for staying happy at home.

Make mealtimes at home only

The best way to start increasing your cat's time at home, is to make their time spent inside exciting. And what's more exciting than food?! If you have previously fed your cat outside, switch to feeding them inside, within a room of your house. Once they're eating inside, extend the amount of time they are in. If your cat already eats inside, extend the amount of time you expect them in for meals.

Extending home time at mealtimes could look like

- Once your cat comes in looking for breakfast or dinner, close all doors and windows.
- Keep them inside for 15 minutes before feeding and a further 15 minutes after feeding.
- Gradually extend the time before and after feeding each day.

Stay home during dawn, dusk and overnight

If you're not already keeping your cat in at night, this is another good place to start. Keeping your cat in at night reduces their chance of being injured or lost. This can also reduce their impact on native wildlife. Night is not the only time to keep your cat safe at home. It is also dangerous at dusk and dawn when many animals are more active. This is when your cat is more likely to find wildlife to hunt. While moving around, and potentially distracted and focussed on hunting, cats are more vulnerable to being hurt or even killed by cars, dogs, foxes, and other cats.

Keeping your cat home at dawn, dusk and overnight could look like

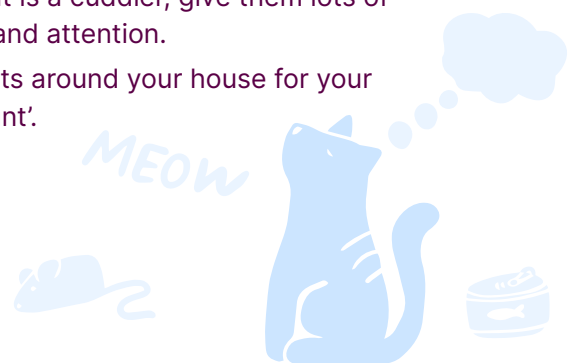
- Make your cat's mealtimes when they should be inside, which is just before sunset or after sunrise.
- Make home more exciting with regular play sessions or exciting treats at those times.

Make home more appealing

In Step 1 you set up your home with everything your cat needs plus some interesting things you'll start using now to make staying home fun and enjoyable.

Making home more appealing than roaming could look like

- Play with your cat each day, even five minutes helps.
- Provide interesting toys rotated regularly.
- Give your cat an extra tasty treat when they come home.
- Use the association of the tasty treat to train your cat to come when you call.
- Bring the outside in with cat 'cat-friendly' plants.
- If your cat is a cuddler, give them lots of cuddles and attention.
- Hide treats around your house for your cat to 'hunt'.



Reduce your cat's ways to roam

If your cat has multiple ways of getting out, begin to permanently close off some exits until there is only one place left to enter and exit. To begin, talk with your family and decide what door will be the 'cat door'. Only let them out through this particular door.

If the cat asks to go out at any of the other doors or exits, do not let them out. This trains your cat that they can't just exit any door and helps you practice keeping doors closed. Once your cat is trained to use the one 'cat door', start training your cat to sit and wait until you tell them they are allowed out.

Training them could look like

- 1. Making a seated position:** Kneel in front of your cat and hold a treat between your finger and thumb about 1-2 cm away from your cat's nose. Slowly lift the treat up slightly higher (5cm) and then move it back towards their tail. Their gaze should follow, and they should naturally begin to sit. Hold the treat in position and give them a few seconds to sit if they don't do this right away.
- 2. Reward and repeat:** Say 'yes' and give them the treat when they sit. Repeat the process another two times, before taking the treat away and instead ask them to sit with only your hand gesture. Using a lure (the food in the hand) is a good start but shouldn't be used more than three times or it will make it more difficult to get your cat to sit without a treat.
- 3. Verbal cue introduction:** If you would prefer to use a vocal cue (like saying 'sit'), introduce this word one second before the hand signal and repeat until your cat associates it with sitting; reinforce this connection between the verbal cue and sitting by saying 'yes!' and giving lots of treats when your cat sits. Gradually you can stop using the hand cue and begin to just use the vocal cue. Or if you prefer, you can stick with the hand cue, or use both together.
- 4. Get your cat to wait for the door:** Encourage longer sits by gradually extending the time between your cat sitting and you saying 'yes!' This could be by just a few seconds at a time until you reach about 20 seconds. Make sure to give treats when you say 'yes!' Introduce a release cue after the 'yes' such as 'okay', which indicates that it's okay for your cat to move or walk through the door now.

5. Reduce treat dependence: Gradually begin to ask your cat to sit without giving them a treat. Always say 'yes!' But begin to give treats only every second or third time and then every fourth and so on, until your cat sits without a treat.

6. Training sessions and patience: Keep training sessions to a maximum of three minutes. Aim for three such sessions a day, allowing breaks. Be patient, as cats vary in learning speed, and avoid frustration by taking breaks if needed. Never force your cat into a seated position as this can cause stress and may lead to behaviour problems or medical issues. Keep the training experience positive. Let your cat leave or stop the training if they aren't responding.

MEOW

Be consistent and don't let them out unless they have sat and waited. This will help you control your cat's roaming and stops them from dashing out an open door when you don't want them to.

When training your cat, ensure the information you are using utilises force-free, fear-free, positive training practices.

Stick to your own backyard

If your cat usually roams wherever they like, try keeping them in your backyard. Eventually you might do this by harness training or installing an enclosed cat run. For now, simply monitor them when you let them outside and call them back in if you see them about to leave your yard. For some cats, this may mean that you only let them outside when you're home and can watch them.

This could look like

- Monitoring your cat in your yard when you're home.
- Call your cat when they go to leave the yard and reward with a tasty treat when they stay.