

Roam to home

Making your roaming cat a home cat

Step 3 | Home cat



Over the next couple of weeks your cat will officially go from 'roam to home'. This means no more outside time unless in a fully enclosed cat-run, a harness or you are closely monitoring them in your backyard.

Be prepared for your cat to be initially frustrated with this lifestyle change. You can minimise that by continuing to reward them for behaviours you want to see, and ignoring or redirecting those you don't.*

Designated time outside

Eventually, when your cat is eating and sleeping inside and coming back when called, reduce their roaming so they are only going out for a short supervised time each day. This should be no longer than an hour.

Try to keep to the same time each day so your cat learns when they are allowed out. Ideally, make it close to a feeding time so your cat comes in when you want them to. Some cats will take longer to get to this point and that's okay, just take things slower at their own pace.

Remember to

- Get them to sit and wait at the 'cat door' before letting them out.
- This is supervised time, so go out with them and call them back if they are about to leave your property.
- Reward them with treats or a meal when you bring them back in.
- Be strict to not let them outside at other times. They may ask, but don't let them or you may undo the training so far. Offer them some fun activities inside your house instead, like play time.

Cold turkey

If your cat has adjusted to all the steps so far, it's now time to cut off your cat's roaming completely. This means keeping doors closed and blocking all possible escape routes such as windows without screens, cat

or dog doors. If you've gradually increased your cat's home time at a pace that's been comfortable to them, this shouldn't be too big of a change for your cat, but it may still cause some stress.

You may notice an increase in behaviours that you or your family find problematic (e.g., meowing more or scratching up furniture). These behaviours may be due to your cat's frustration or seeking to be let outside again. You can minimise these behaviours by continuing to reward those you want to see and don't engage with, or re-direct the behaviours you don't (see 'redirecting, not just ignoring' in Step 4).

Be patient and provide activities, support and rewards that make being inside enjoyable for your cat. Despite what your cat may try telling you, at this stage, cats can be very happy at home and can have very full and fulfilling lives without needing to roam. Stick to your plan and remind your cat of the good things about being inside.

Remember to

- Keep your cat at home and only allow them outside on a harness or in a cat run.
- Increase play time, cuddle time and enrichments to keep your cat entertained and content.
- Reward your cat for being home.



* See Step 4: Troubleshooting

Doorway management

It's time to establish a routine to keep your cat in, even when you need to go out. This means talking with your family about how to handle doors when entering and exiting the home.

If you share your home with a dog and have a dog door, you may need to fill it in or remove it. If your dog and cat have a significant size difference, a dog flap with magnets that are too strong for the cat to push open or an electronic device which only lets specific animals out could be an alternative option. However, your cat may run out behind the dog and get stuck.

The last thing you want is your cat outside with no way of getting back in, so consider these options carefully and weigh up whether the benefits of having the dog door outweigh the risks.

Remember to

- Talk to your family, house guests and visitors about keeping doors closed.
- Fill in any cat or dog doors.
- Keep an eye on your cat when you let dogs out or leave the house.

House keeping

When your cat was roaming, they may have used that time to toilet or scratch or stretch. Now they are inside, you may see an increase in their litter tray use and scratching or running around the house. It's important to keep spaces clean for your cat, especially areas where they eat, drink or toilet as cats are very sensitive to smells and mess. Cats won't want to use a dirty litter tray or eat in a room near smelly litter.

Remember to

- Scoop litter trays daily and completely clean regularly
- Make sure water is fresh and clean.
- Check if your cat is using their scratch post and if not, try a different size, texture or shape.
- Increase play time to control energy levels.
- Spread resources around the house, with food and water kept well away from litter trays.

Expect some stress behaviours

Change can be stressful, and you may notice your cat seems frustrated, sits near the door, vocalises more or is scratching the furniture. These behaviours are to be expected and should reduce with time.

Setting up your house to be pleasant and fun should reduce any stress on your cat. If they're still begging to roam, you need to stay firm on keeping them in, or you risk reinforcing that meowing or being destructive is a way to being allowed out. Instead, focus on showing them inside is fun and comfy by distracting them with play, food or comfort.

If you've tried everything, given it some time, and your cat is still not settling, seek advice from a force free trainer or a veterinary behaviourist.

Distracting your cat could look like

- Move scratch posts to any areas your cat has begun to scratch.
- If you notice attention-seeking behaviour to be let out, give them a different sort of attention like playing, or doing some sitting training.
- Importantly: If your cat shows any serious behaviours such as urinating outside of the litter tray, or injuring themselves, other pets or people, seek veterinary advice immediately.

