



CATIO SPACES®

Designing Spaces for Safe, Healthy & Happy Cats

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Photos: please credit **Catio Spaces**

Veterinarians can help educate cat owners on safe, enriching outdoor enclosures

SEATTLE, Washington (January 15, 2019) -- Veterinarians who own cats are keenly aware of the “indoor/outdoor dilemma” many pet owners experience. They know the consequences of unsupervised outdoor time can be costly and even catastrophic. Conversely, an unenriched, indoor-only life can have downsides veterinarians see every day, such as obesity, aggression, furniture destruction, and inappropriate elimination.

While 75 percent of U.S.-based veterinarians choose to keep their own cats enclosed (according to a poll by Vetstreet), veterinarians -- including those outside the U.S. -- have differing opinions on the indoor/outdoor debate:

- In a report for *Petful*, Debora Lichtenberg, VDM, stated, “Few topics polarize opinion more than the matter of indoor cats vs. outdoor cats.” She lists parasites, fleas, viruses (including feline immunodeficiency virus [FIV] and feline leukemia ([FeLV]), and trauma as leading health problems she sees for outdoor cats.
- Pippa Elliott, BVMS, MRCVS in the United Kingdom, believes, “By giving cats free access to the outdoors, they are able to express natural behaviors. They can climb, claw, pounce, swipe, pad or gallop as the mood takes them. In short, they exercise both their mind and body as nature intended.”
- Mindy Cohan, VMD, noted the majority of outdoor cats maintain a healthy body weight. In an article this Philadelphia-area veterinarian wrote for *PetMD*, she referenced veterinary behaviorists who tout the importance of environmental enrichment for cats.

Multiple studies have indicated the value of environmental enrichment in the delay of cognitive dysfunction in rats and mice, potentially indicating similar value for aging felines.

So is there room for common ground in the debate? Are there ways for the medical community to help clients keep their cats safe while also offering enrichment?

Practical solutions that provide outdoor access are available, with catios (an outdoor enclosure that provides feline safety and enrichment) and leash-walking for cats becoming increasingly popular options.

Penny Olson, DVM, a veterinarian in Bellevue, Washington and the owner of three cats, once believed it was best to keep cats indoors for their own safety, to protect the wildlife they prey upon, and to help prevent overpopulation.

In the course of her career that spans more than 20 years, Dr. Olson, a relief veterinarian, has treated cats whose injuries are the result of motor vehicles; fights with other cats; attacks by coyotes, dogs, eagles, and bobcats; lacerations from nails or barbed wire; being trapped in trees, garages and sheds; and even being harmed by people with ill intent.

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For Dr. Olson, the solution to protect her trio of felines was a catio. She sought the assistance of Catio Spaces to have one built for her deck and since adding one for her pets she says she could never go without a catio. She credits the space-extending catio with decreasing fighting among the cats, curbing loud vocalizing at night, and curtailing door dashing. “It’s been a great investment in terms of improving the lives of everyone in our family.”

Catio designer Cynthia Chomos, the founder of **Catio Spaces** and a cat owner, works locally and globally with cat owners and animal welfare organizations on a variety of issues. She regularly answers inquiries covering a range of concerns, from protecting cats from predators, toxins, fights and cars to solving multi-cat issues associated with territory or stimulation.



“Cats naturally want to be outside where they can breathe fresh air and experience the sights, sounds and stimulation of the natural world,” says Chomos.

“Responsible owners want a safe retreat for their cats that gives them the stimulation they crave. Whether a cat owner has an indoor or outdoor pet, I always recommend staying current with annual vet visits and talking to their veterinarian about their catio,” she emphasized. She notes veterinarians typically recommend regular flea and tick prevention for cats with catio access and may also advise additional vaccinations or heartworm preventatives.

Chomos said her own cat’s yearning to be in the sun and watch birds in her backyard garden inspired the creation of Catio Spaces. She drew on her experience as a feng shui expert and color consultant to build a window-box catio for Serena, her adopted, sun-worshipping tabby. That initial perch led to the formation of Catio Spaces, a company that builds custom catios and offers **DIY** (Do It Yourself) plans in a variety of sizes and styles. Since that prototype in 2014, custom and DIY plans are being crafted for cats around the world – ranging from a New York City high-rise to a Seattle houseboat.

Rather than looking like an unsightly cage, catios (sometimes called “cat patios”) resemble outdoor rooms. In addition to utilitarian functions, Chomos emphasizes catios have aesthetic value.

Whether small and simple or large and luxurious, catios offer numerous **benefits** for cats and cat owners. Catios can complement a home, with designs available for windows, porches, patios, and decks, as well as gardens or yards.

Chomos is especially pleased to accommodate special needs cats, including cerebellar hypoplasia, tripawds, and cats that are blind, have mobility issues, or are challenged by age-related impairments. Incorporating ramps, railings, soft landings made of carpet tiles, textured outdoor mats for gripping and adding heated cat shelters can assist in enjoying life in a catio, she notes.

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The basic structure of a catio includes wood framing, escape-proof galvanized wire, a polycarbonate or wire mesh roof, and floor options that can include grass, decking and pavers, Chomos explained. Versatile designs include both above-ground and ground-level sanctuaries that may have seating and other space for human and feline interaction.



Shelves for vertical and horizontal movement, perches for lounging, toys for enrichment, and cat safe plants are additional elements owners can incorporate in their catio. “Best of all,” Chomos exclaims, “each catio can be decorated to suit a feline’s fancy.”

Cats can enter their catio 24/7 through a cat door insert for a window, wall or door. (Such doors can be purchased online or at a local pet or home improvement store.) Many have locks to control outdoor time.

As the awareness of catios grows, the list of advocates is expanding to include bird conservationists.

“Catios are a fantastic way to provide cats with safe outdoor experiences that simultaneously protect birds and other wildlife,” says Grant Sizemore, director of Invasive Species Programs at American Bird Conservancy. “These customizable enclosures will no doubt gain in popularity as owners recognize the opportunities for cats and peace of mind for themselves that catios provide,” Sizemore suggested while citing studies indicating free-roaming cats kill upwards of one billion birds in the U.S. each year.

Multi-cat owner Jennifer Hillman believes providing cats with outdoor access in enclosures “ensures we are good cat owners and good neighbors.” Hillman, the vice president of Grassroots Outreach & Engagement at The Humane Society of the United States, works to aid animals in distress and crisis. To her, cat enclosures “mean we owners are being responsible for wildlife, responsible for community space, and responsible for the safety of our cats.”

Catio advocates are committed to raising awareness of catios, says Chomos. She and her company co-sponsor (with PAWS and The Humane Society of the United States) and help organize a tour of catios in the Seattle area every summer. The educational events, which are becoming popular across the U.S. and Canada, feature self-guided tours of homes with catios (and their lucky inhabitants) and showcase how such enclosures can be incorporated into any home or garden.

Chomos also supports animal welfare groups with an [affiliate program](#) whereby participating organizations receive 10 percent of the sale of each DIY plan from Catio Spaces.

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Special offer to veterinarians:

Catio Spaces offers veterinarians resources including DIY Catio **flyers** and **free catio tips** for cat owners interested in building a catio themselves or hiring a local carpenter to build one for them. To request a sample and for more information, email: info@catiospaces.com

Prices for catios are as wide-ranging as the breeds that inhabit them. Award-winning DIY plans from Catio Spaces start at around \$40, while custom designs that are large, luxurious and lavishly appointed for human and feline enjoyment can cost several thousand dollars.

Regardless of the choice, catio advocates say “paws up,” because such enclosures can be an attractive addition to a home, and a priceless investment in the health and wellbeing of both cats and cat owners.

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RESOURCES:

About Catios and Cat Enclosures: <https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/>

Free Catio Tips: <https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/free-tips/>

DIY Catio Plans: <https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/diy-plans/>

Top 10 Benefits of a Catio (box follows): <https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/why-a-catio/>

IMAGES: (please credit **Catio Spaces**)

Photo gallery: <https://catiospaces.com/photo-gallery/>

(For high resolution images, contact Cynthia Chomos, info@catiospaces.com or 206-919-0107)

VIDEOS by Catio Spaces:

All Videos: <https://catiospaces.com/catios-cat-enclosures/videos/all-videos/>

YouTube Links:

- Urban Deck Catio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFjoSJUOunc>
- Cerebellar Hypoplasia Cats Houseboat Catio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6lhafOsX4KQ>
- Door Dasher’s Haven Catio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oh85p3aZ8cA&t=2s>
- Serena’s Garden Getaways: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWDuttDfPag>
- Wildlife Watcher Catio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOeEuHvuUVs&t=32s>
- Carter & Bandit’s Retreat Catio: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9I5ytz8z-lc&t=8s>

MEET CYNTHIA: <https://catiospaces.com/catio-expert/speaker/>

10 BENEFITS OF CATIOS FOR CAT OWNERS:

1. Protection from vehicles, predators, poisons, diseases or getting lost or stuck in a tree.
2. Reduce vet bills from cat fights or injuries.
3. Protect birds and wildlife.
4. Help reduce the roaming cat populations in local communities.
5. Provide a healthy outdoor lifestyle with fresh air, exercise, bird watching and sunbathing.
6. Help reduce indoor multi-cat issues by adding more territory.
7. Enjoy feline and human interaction surrounded by nature and fresh air.
8. Help reduce indoor odors with an additional outdoor litter box.
9. Good neighbor relations (keep your cat out of their gardens and yards).
10. Peace of mind knowing your cat is in a safe and protected place.