A CAT-FRIENDLY HOME

When a cat lives in the wild, each day is rich in experiences, allowing it to accumulate a wide range of impressions and to encounter other cats. For a “pure indoor cat”, it is therefore important that the human owner provides sufficient stimuli. Unless we understand and consider a cat’s needs, we cannot turn our home into one where it will be able to live permanently and happily. Here are some suggestions on making your home cat-friendly.

The litter box
Please note: as regards the number of litter boxes, there should be at least as many boxes as cats, and ideally one more besides. Therefore, a single cat should have two litter boxes, both sturdy and of an adequate size. Their location should not be too remote and also not too central, and they should not be placed near the cat’s feeding place or sleeping place. Closed litter boxes may be very agreeable for the owner but cats will often refuse to use them. The boxes should be filled with fine, soft litter to make it easy for the cat to bury its excrement. Hard litter that sticks to a cat’s paws will often lead to soiling. To keep the boxes clean and free from odours, you should remove the excrement regularly (two to three times a day as required). They should be placed in various locations around the home, not next to each other.

Although cats are by nature very clean animals, soiling is one of the most common problems encountered with indoor cats. When determining the trigger for this, you must first investigate and rule out organic causes (especially bladder inflammations and diseases of the urinary tract) and pain. If the cat still continues to soil its home, although all the relevant tips have been followed and health problems have been ruled out, this indicates that the cat is unhappy with something in its surroundings. To find out what your cat’s concern is, you should consult an expert.

The cat’s eating and drinking place
After killing their prey, cats living in the wild will always bring it to a safe, quiet spot before eating it. Therefore, your home should also include a safe space specially earmarked for feeding. It is also important to a cat’s wellbeing always to feed it in the same place and at fixed times. While feeding, it should be left alone. The food should be provided in small portions over multiple mealtimes. You should make sure wet food in particular is not left to stand too long, since it will go off quickly.

Photo: Tierfotoagentur.de_R. Richter.
Even in the wild, cats eat a balanced diet consisting of more than just mice, so domestic cats too should be offered some variety.

It is well known that cats do not drink a great deal. However, it has been found that cats much prefer to drink water when it is not directly next to their feeding place. So, if you place a water bowl in another room, the cat will be far more likely to accept it. Cats are often seen drinking enthusiastically from washbasins or baths, though you should make sure these do not contain any residual traces of detergents or cleansers. Cat drinking fountains can also be a good way of encouraging them to drink more water!

A cat that is not let out regularly will also need cat grass as this helps get rid of hairs swallowed while cleaning itself, either via the intestinal tract or through vomiting.

**The home itself**
The kitchen and bathroom contain any number of safety hazards for the curious cat. This is something every owner should think about. Worth a special mention here are hot cooking units and open ovens, washing machines and fridges: these are the top causes of accidents, though dangerous liquids, sharp objects and the majority of houseplants can also lead to poisoning or injury. Please try to eliminate these safety hazards. In the case of an electric cooker, placing a pot of water on a cooking unit that is still hot after cooking will do the trick.

**Opportunities for scratching**
For a cat, scratching is a way of sharpening its claws, marking out its turf through scents in the pads of its paws – and just plain fun! It can do a fair amount of damage with its claws, from the “designs” it might inflict on its owner’s hands to the ones it leaves on wallpaper, carpets and upholstery. It is therefore very important to get hold of a scratching tree – but although this is a good start, it can only go part-way towards meeting your cat’s needs. What you really need is a multistorey climbing and scratching tree capable of being attached to a nearby shelf mounted at an angle. What could be nicer for a cat than a scratching tree that is very nearly a real tree?

**Opportunities for climbing**
Cats enjoy occupying raised vantage points: these give them a feeling of safety while allowing them to indulge their curiosity. Breakable objects should therefore be placed in safe locations and books arranged so as to create a stable surface. Find out from observation which shelf your cat prefers and create space for it there. Since cats like huddling up in small recesses, you should only remove objects that really are in the way, otherwise your cat will seek out a different, even more cluttered shelf. There is nothing cats like better than a wide variety of opportunities to use and explore the room from a high vantage point. Possible solutions include placing a number of shelves together, creating bridges between them or stacking up shelving like steps.

**Opportunities for sleeping and withdrawing**
It is simply impossible to assign a cat a particular location for sleeping. If it didn’t seek out its own sleeping place, it wouldn’t be a cat.

Cats love warmth, so one way to make your cat very happy is to set up a resting place above a radiator installed in a quiet, safe location. If the bedding is nice and soft, so much the better. A blanket or a towel will do just fine, and will be easy to keep clean. Your local pet shop will also be able to supply you with purpose-built cat radiator beds.

Hollow spaces mean safety to a cat. Just leave a drawer open in your desk or dresser for your cat to use. Caution: cats often enjoy climbing around behind the dresser, so don’t close it abruptly!

Every cat should have a number of places to lie and rest – some catering to its need for physical contact and warmth, others giving it a chance to withdraw and hide.

**Doors**
Most indoor cats will soon become interested in what lies on the other side of the front door, since their owner keeps disappearing through it! If your cat learns to operate the door handle, we recommend replacing
it with a doorknob. Many cats also like to lurk behind the door, then slip out quickly between a human’s legs. Please be ready for these sophisticated escape attempts when coming home, especially if the front door is open. Internal doors, on the other hand, should be left open as much as possible, because cats simply cannot stand confined spaces!

**The play instinct and activity**

In the wild, cats are keen explorers and hunters. Since flies and other insects only rarely stray into the home, it falls to a cat’s owner to channel its inborn hunting instinct into constructive play. Such games should be structured to allow the cat to act out natural behaviour patterns like stalking its prey, pouncing and striking it.

**Two cats in one home**

If left alone at home all day, two cats will stave off the boredom through play, each spurring the other on. Although cats do sleep a lot, these rest phases alternate with highly active periods, which are spent hunting animals, playing and defending their patch. But it is also important for each cat to have opportunities for avoiding the other and withdrawing, and to make sure the two animals are compatible and get on well. If you are acquiring two kittens, the arrangement will often work better if they are both of the same gender. If you want to socialise an adult animal, you should seek advice from a behavioural consultant or from properly trained staff at an animal refuge, describing your own cat’s character and preferences. Some cats simply prefer living alone, and this too should be respected.

**Above:** Cats love to scratch.
**Centre:** It’s good for cats to have a variety of toys with which to play.
**Below:** Keep an eye out for your kitty who may occasionally linger behind the door, waiting for the right moment to her great escape!
**Windows and balconies**

Windows are a major attraction for indoor cats, representing a doorway to the unknown and to freedom. In an urban flat, especially one that is quite high up, this can easily lead to a fatality, so it is essential to safeguard them. Nets and bars are available in shops, and will prevent cats escaping or falling. Unfortunately, tilted windows continue to cause serious accidents. The cat climbs towards the opening, slips into the window slot and is unable to free itself – and the results can range from bruising to suffocation!

However, provided all the risks have been dealt with, a cat should not be kept away from the window. A safe spot on the windowsill where it can lie and observe the world will afford it a great deal of variety and entertainment.

It goes without saying that if you have the opportunity, a cat will particularly enjoy sunning itself and observing the neighbourhood from a structured, well-secured balcony.