



Just Fence Me In: How to Safely Contain Your Dog or Cat



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Many dogs and cats are our shadows, and follow us throughout our days. The dog lies at our feet; the cat lies on the computer keyboard. What to do, then, when we need privacy for an extended amount of time, or when we want them to safely get some fresh air in the yard?

Let's start there, in the yard; first, unfenced is potentially unsafe. Every day we hear stories of "My dog never left the yard before!" or "My cat usually comes back right away!" as clients tearfully report their missing pet. If you can, install a five- or six-foot fence that you know your dog can't get over or dig under. Please do not install an electronic containment system that relies on shocking your dog or cat if they approach an electronically-determined perimeter. They do not keep other animals or people out of your yard, can hurt and frighten your dog, and if your dog is inspired to chase a squirrel, they may run right through the shock barrier. If you do not have a fence, you can use a cable tether, however, *never* leave your dog alone when they are tethered. These products are available indoors for cats, and can also hurt or frighten them, and if they are shocked when you are near, it can affect your bond as the cat could become frightened of you.

You can increase your dog's enjoyment of the yard by scattering a handful of their kibble in the grass for them to find. You can also enrich their "scent-ability" and training by putting them in a sit-stay, then placing one kibble in the grass for them to find. Start with it close, then move farther away gradually. Eventually, you will be able to place it far away, and when you say "Find it!" your dog will tear off for a nose full of adventure. A flirt pole is another way to interact in the yard with your dog; again, use the sit-stay you trained, lead out 30 feet and release them to chase the toy on the pole. It's so good to get their sides heaving; they will be more fit and take a better nap later.



What if you want your cat to have a taste of the Great Outdoors? For those with a yard, balcony, or deck space, a "catio" is a great option! Catos are enclosed outdoor spaces (cat patios) that provide cats with a safe way to enjoy all the sights, smells, and sounds of the outdoors in a safe manner without being a risk to the local wildlife. There are many catio options to consider depending on your budget, space, and DIY abilities. They vary from smaller mesh-type play pens to more elaborate structures with multi-level resting perches, tunnels, and toileting areas surrounded by wire mesh fencing and roofing. You might even consider adding a cat door for your cat to use so that they can go in and out of the catio as they choose. Another option to get your cat outside safely is to train it to be comfortable wearing a harness and walking on a leash. Make sure to choose a cat specific harness that fits properly! Work on this slowly, starting by simply putting the harness on your cat and feeding some favorite treats while she is wearing it. You can also work on this at mealtimes, so she associates something great with wearing her harness! As she gets used to it, incorporate some interactive play sessions to get her used to moving around with the harness on. Then, once she is comfortable wearing it, clip on the leash and let her explore first inside, then outside in safe areas. Some confident city slicker cats even enjoy outings to the local parks or cafes with their owners! Remember, this should be enjoyable for your cat; if she is fearful or seems nervous about being outside on leash, this may not be right for your cat.

Indoors, there are lots of ways to contain your dog or cat. For dogs, we heartily recommend training them to love being in their crate. To train this, toss a handful of dog-preferred treats into the crate while giving a cue such as "Kennel up!" Do this a few times in a row, 3-4x a week. Note that you will leave the door open at first. If your dog is hesitant to go in (some dogs may be fearful because transport from another part of the world was frightening to them), get better treats; train at mealtime, giving them their meal in the crate with the door open. Note that, to the

dog, “better” means smellier. Dogs have a great sense of smell, and a poor sense of taste, so the smellier it is, the more they like it! Think fish treats or something freeze-dried; if you think it smells disgusting...it’s a good treat for your dog. If a crate isn’t the thing for your dog, you can train them in the same way to lie on a mat; simply make the mat the place where the treats happen. Your dog will start showing up there in order to get a treat.

Many cats also enjoy resting in a private enclosed space, such as a small crate or a carrier. If your cat does not, you can certainly work on training her to be comfortable there so that she can be contained easily if necessary. Rather than taking the carrier out only for vet visits and other potentially “scary” outings, leave it out in a desirable place (sun spot!) as a regular part of the home environment, hiding treats and toys in there regularly for her to discover throughout the day. You can also feed meals regularly in the



carrier, to create a positive association with going inside. You might also designate a room to be a cat sanctuary where the cat is comfortable being alone; it could be an office, spare bedroom, or even a bathroom. Make this area as desirable as possible with food, toys, litterbox, perches, cozy resting spots, etc. Spend some time separating your cat here regularly for brief periods of time with a food/puzzle toy or a new/special toy so that she can get used to being alone. Additionally, use a Feliway diffuser in the room. Feliway diffusers emit synthetic feline pheromones that have been clinically shown to reduce stress in cats. This will give you a great, safe option for separating your cat from the action as necessary, such as when there are service people present, non-cat loving guests (what?!), etc.

In these ways we have presented, with a little planning ahead, you can contain your pet safely in a way that is fun and enriching for them, and that give you the peace of mind you need!