

Home Makeovers to **Meow** About:

How to Enrich Your Cat's Environment

by KATINA ANTONIADES

Climbing, perching, leaping, running, scratching, wildlife-watching—take a look around your house to see if your cat can easily perform these activities. If not, your feline friend may not be as happy as she could be.

Cats who crave excitement may engage in undesirable behaviors, as certified cat behavior consultant Marilyn Krieger has discovered with many of her clients' pets. "People go off for hours and hours and don't provide enough environmental enrichment and things for the cats to do," says Krieger, a San Francisco resident and owner of The Cat Coach. "They either get bored or ... you end up with couch potatoes who are very overweight."

Even if your kitty seems content—with toys to bat and chase, and a scratching post or two—more enhancements to her environment can make her life even better.

Cats are safest when kept indoors, away from roaming dogs and wildlife, speeding cars, and people who may harm them. But if your cat needs outdoor time, you can give her a taste without putting her in harm's way. Teaching her to walk on a leash or providing playtime in a portable enclosure, such as those sold by companies like Kittywalk or Wild Whiskers, are two strategies.

If you'd rather give your cat a more permanent way to get some fresh air, consider building an enclosure in your yard. Before you begin, ask your vet how to ensure your cat will stay healthy amid outdoor risks like fleas and ticks. Don't forget to scour the area for poisonous plants, too.

Once you've made adjustments for safety, it's time to plan. A quick Internet search will reveal ideas and inspiration for DIY cat pens, usually made from wood framing and wire mesh. If you're not the handy type, several online vendors offer kits that simply need to be assembled.

A well-constructed enclosure—complete with some kind of ceiling—ensures kitties can't get out and other animals can't get in. Keep an eye out for sharp edges and pieces that cats could chew or ingest.

Krieger emphasizes the importance of making an outdoor pen feline-friendly by adding items like cat trees and scratching

posts. Include a supply of fresh water, and incorporate shelter from the weather, she says. (Of course, cats shouldn't be left outside in extreme temperatures or stormy conditions.)

In an ideal situation, says Krieger, cats should have access to the enclosure from the indoors and the ability to go in and out as they wish. "I believe that cats should always have choices," she says.

Even if you can't give your kitty an outdoor habitat, you can adjust his indoor environment to meet his needs. Look for behavior cues: For example, the favored feline spots in your home often turn out to

be the highest places, such as the fridge, armoire, or tallest bookcase. Sitting in high spots gives cats a feeling of safety, an opportunity to survey their territory, and a way to test the kitty pecking order, says Krieger. The hierarchy they create isn't static, she says. Instead, cats take turns being the "top cat"—literally.

You can add to the existing high spots in your home by buying or building tall cat trees. Some companies sell cat furniture made to look like real trees; others use actual stumps and branches. And some websites offer guidelines for constructing your own.

10 Ways to Keep Your Cat Happy

1. Scatter several pieces of your cat's dry food in hiding places around your home or in a kibble-dispensing toy like the Funkitty Egg-Cersizer (premier.com).

2. Visit your local shelter to find him a buddy.

3. Provide a rotating mix of toys, including plastic balls, fabric mice, and tunnels or play cubes.

4. Leash-train him and spend time outside together.

5. Give him paper bags (with handles removed to prevent strangulation) and cardboard boxes for playtime.

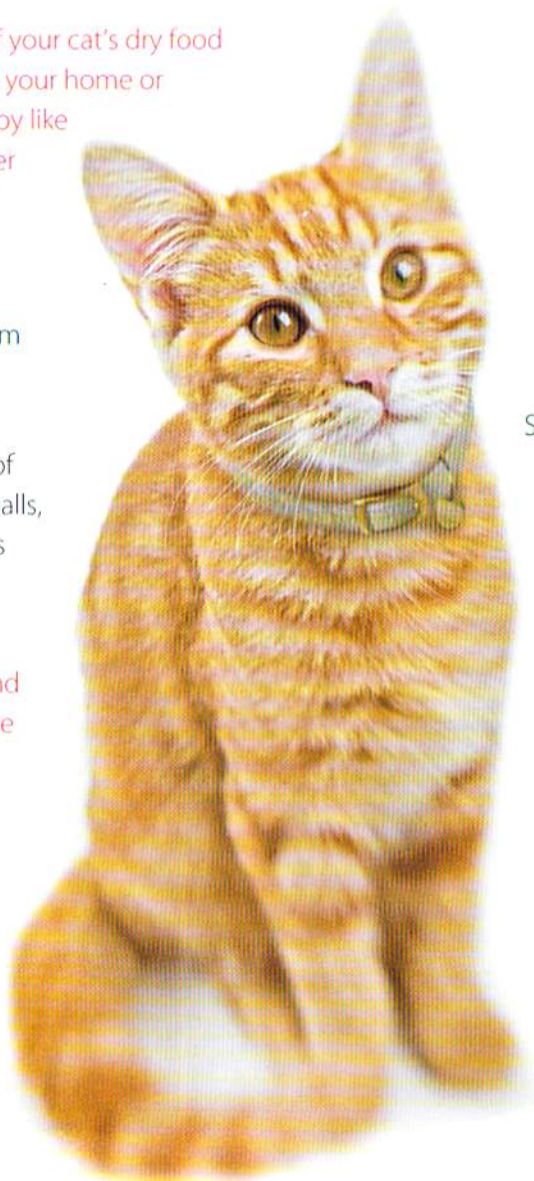
Teach him tricks—you can even try clicker training (clickertraining.com). **6.**

Play a DVD designed for cats, featuring birds, mice, squirrels, and other feline entertainment. **7.**

Spend time brushing him, playing with him, and talking to him. **8.**

Provide safe plants to munch on, like cat grass (wheat grass and others) and catnip. **9.**

Place a bird feeder outside a window to give him a tantalizing show. To cut down on bird strikes, place feeders less than 3 feet or more than 30 feet away from windows. **10.**



Wall-mounted platforms also provide kitties the opportunity to climb, jump, and play. Window perches (again, store-bought or DIY) give your cat a perfect place to sleep, catch some rays, and watch the world go by.

People with multiple cats need to provide more than one way up or down a cat tree or wall shelves, Krieger says. That way, one cat won't be able to corner another in the middle of a conflict.

When buying or making trees, shelves, or perches, make sure they include something to scratch. Scratching doesn't just keep your kitty's nails in shape; it provides an important outlet. "[Cats scratch] when they have a lot of energy," says Krieger. "They have scent glands on the bottom of their paws, so when they scratch, they're marking their territory. But when they're feeling conflicted, they will scratch, and also when they're feeling very happy and joyful."

Trees and perches will also attract your cat if they include cozy places to hide. Krieger explains why cats may enjoy such spots. "It could give them a feeling of safety," she says. "Also, it's probably warm. And ... perhaps they feel they can see what's going on without other animals seeing them."

By shelling out a little cash or a lot, by making a quick shopping trip or spending days creating and planning a project, you can turn your home into a kitty paradise.

RESOURCES

Web extras: Find tips on leash training and more at humanesociety.org/magazine.

Cat habitats: Check out portable enclosures and climbing platforms at humanesociety.org/humandomain.

DIY projects: Get inspired by the DIY section of the blog moderncat.net.

Other vendors of kitty jungle gyms, perches, and containment systems:
cagesbydesign.com
catsondeck.com
kittywalk.com
wildwhiskers.com
catsplay.com
katwalks.com
therefinedfeline.com



The galvanized fencing stretched across the wood framing of Amy Russell's 11-by-14-foot "Catararium" is stronger than chicken wire and more eye-pleasing to the neighbors, she says.

Backyard Playgrounds for Bathing Beauties

At Cindy Carlson's home in Las Vegas, cats have staged a takeover of what used to be an exclusively canine domain: a dog run. About six years ago, Carlson turned the area into a secure enclosure for her kitties.

"This way ... they could enjoy being outdoors, watching the birds, bugs, and clouds," Carlson says, "and we wouldn't have to worry about staying with them all the time."

To foil furry escape artists, Carlson and her husband enclosed the top of the run with chicken wire and covered the front half of the "roof" with a screen to shade it from the sun. Grapevines give additional shade. The cats have everything they need inside: litter boxes, catnip plants to nibble, 8-foot cat trees, and a special dish to discourage foraging ants.

Amy Russell's six cats enjoy a similar view of life in a Seattle kitty palace constructed by Russell's boyfriend. Thanks to a small opening in a sliding glass door to the couple's home, these free-wheeling kitties come and go as they please. Like Carlson's feline friends, Russell's enjoy a cat tree and litter box as well as perches, benches, a ramp, and a wicker screen for shade on warm days. "I would encourage anybody to do it," says Russell. "It's an easy project, and the payoffs are great."

Though Carlson and her husband contemplated an enclosed catwalk to the space, concerns about outdoor dangers—including black widows and brown recluse spiders—precluded unlimited access to the pen. Carlson checks the area each time the cats enter the space.

In the early spring, they stay out almost all day, but as temperatures rise, their daily jaunts become briefer. If no one's at home or it's cold, windy, or otherwise unsafe outside, the kitties stay in. After a day in the run, says Carlson, "they sleep like babies."

Living the High Life in Indoor Paradises

If cats could design the ultimate kitty abode,

it would probably look a lot like the Cats' House in San Diego, otherwise known as the home of Bob Walker and Frances Mooney. The space they share with their nine cats has been filmed and written about countless times since they began customizing it in 1987. They've often opened their home to the public to raise funds for the National Cat Protection Society, an organization with shelters in Spring Valley and Newport Beach (and the source of most of their kitties).

It's no wonder so many people want to get a closer look. The colorful, creative space contains more than 140 feet of "catwalks," raised feline walkways that run through most of its rooms and even through walls. The walkways are constructed of kiln-dried wood to prevent warping or cracking, says Walker. He offers important advice for those who want to follow his lead: Cover inclined paths with carpeting for traction, and leave enough space between the walkway and the adjacent wall to give cats room to turn around.

Allowing room for expanding cat girth is also a good idea, as one cat at Walker's house demonstrated when he got stuck while making his way through a star-shaped opening in a wall (an incident caught on tape by a visiting Japanese film crew). "Always imagine your cats getting bigger," says Walker.

Territorial needs should be considered in any feline design. When Karen Maraj and Jake Lukaszewski of Brooklin, Ontario, retrofitted their living room to accommodate their cats, Maraj aimed to prevent fights for top-cat status by making sure each of three platforms—attached to a wall and positioned within jumping distance—would allow only one kitty at a time. Lukaszewski constructed the shelving from plywood and added carpeting and sisal for traction and scratching. "I know so many friends that want to do things like declawing, and I just get really upset when I hear that," says Maraj, "because a cat will have to do certain things—you just will have to give them a place to do [them]."

The kitty recreation area is just one of many DIY projects the couple has embarked on in their home, where they've also installed hardwood flooring and built an entertainment center. For the more cat-centric recreation area of their home, they added the shelving after getting rid of a store-bought cat tree that clashed with their modern style and blocked the light from a nearby window; the remodel also included a hiding and perching box that Lukaszewski attached to an office window. Built from solid pine, the box offers sisal for scratching and contains three circular holes just right for poking paws. For comfort, Maraj made two cushions from an old pillow.

The couple's cats, Suzy and Odie, seem more content now, says Maraj. "They have their own little place. Sometimes for hours you won't find one of them because she's upstairs playing on there, looking out the window."

➤ **LEARN MORE** about Bob Walker and Frances Mooney's home at thecatshouse.com, and check out Walker's books, *The Cats' House* and *Cats into Everything*. Find details on Maraj and Lukaszewski's projects at jakeandkaren.com.



Suzy and Odie don't mind being boxed in at Karen Maraj and Jake Lukaszewski's Ontario home, where they have a window seat on the world (above). San Diego residents Bob Walker and Frances Mooney have friends in high places, thanks to the feline kingdom they've created (below).

