



Leash Training Your Cat

Being a Responsible Guardian and a Good Neighbour!

While most city dwellers know dogs must be kept on a leash, many do not realize that in many municipalities, the same law applies to cats. Prowling cats can be a nuisance to neighbours, digging up flowerbeds

and leaving behind a mess. More importantly, allowing your cat to roam exposes them to illness and disease, puts them at risk for injury or death from animal attacks or being struck by a vehicle, and may lead to impoundment if they become lost or are picked up by animal control. The average life span of an outdoor cat is significantly less than that of an indoor cat, with the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies reporting that outdoor cats live only 2-5 years versus an average of 12.5 years for indoor cats.

While the benefits of keeping your cat indoors are numerous, many people feel that it is unnatural to keep a cat from experiencing the great outdoors. While this could not be further from the truth, a safer alternative is available to responsible cat owners: harness and leash training your cat. Although it takes a lot of patience and may not work for everyone, teaching your cat to enjoy time outdoors on a leash is a good way to let Fluffy or Mittens answer the call of the wild without endangering themselves or becoming a problem to others. Keep in mind the following pointers when considering this option for your feline:

Do...

- Use an H-shaped harness, with a strap that goes around the cat's neck and another that goes around the stomach behind the front legs. The leash should attach to a ring in the center of the harness, above the cat's back. This type of harness is available in a range of sizes and colours from most pet supply stores.

- Let your cat try out the harness first by wearing it indoors, starting with short periods of time and gradually increasing until they are comfortable. Don't be surprised if your cat throws itself down and refuses to move the first time the harness is put on! Once your cat is used to wearing the harness, let them try out the leash by dragging it around indoors a few times.
- Select a sturdy, lightweight leash with a loop at the end to fit around your wrist. Pet supply stores carry leashes that are made specifically for cats.
- Use positive reinforcement, such as giving treats, to encourage your cat when they are learning to wear the harness and leash.
- Be patient and gentle with your cat. Walking on a leash does not come naturally to most cats, but in time their excitement about being taken outdoors will likely overcome their uneasiness.

Don't...

- Leave your cat unsupervised while on a leash. A cat's natural defences are seriously reduced when on a leash, and they can quickly become hopelessly entangled when left to wander around. Even worse, if they have access to high surfaces, they can be left dangling when they jump down without enough slack to reach the ground!
- Attach a leash directly to a cat's collar—unlike dogs, a cat's neck cannot withstand any amount of tugging on a leash.
- Let your cat eat your neighbours grass while outdoors. Pesticides and parasites found on lawns can pose serious health risks to cats.
- Take your cat near busy streets or areas where they may encounter other animals. Quiet, secluded yards and parks are the best places to take your cat on a leash.