

Boroughbred Behavior Resources



Issue: Escape Artists (Door Darting Cats)

Some cats are really focused on trying to go outside, in spite of your best efforts to keep them inside. One reason why they might attempt to escape the home is because there are lots of enticing scents that come through the door, making the outdoors exciting and appealing for them. Another reason is when there isn't much to do at home, a cat might try to dart outside to explore or hunt. It's stressful for cat owners to regularly try and keep an escape artist kitty inside, especially when they sprint for the door each time it opens. Some door darting cats are more discrete in trying to sneak outdoors; they hide behind furniture and wait for the perfect moment to slip out and go unnoticed. Cat owners may not even notice they've gone missing until it's too late. Cats that aren't used to being outdoors are at serious risk of becoming lost, contracting a contagious disease, being hit by cars, getting into fights with other animals, ingesting poison, and other dangers. Here are some tips you can use to keep your kitty from escaping.

Spay/Neuter

Un-altered cats will have the urge to go outdoors to find potential mates. Spaying and neutering may not completely remove your cat's desire to go outdoors, but they will no longer have the desire to breed, which may reduce their drive to run outside.

Indoor Enrichment

If your cat is itching to go outdoors, they may not be getting enough stimulation in the home. Our homes are usually designed to entertain humans, but do very little for the cats. Give them a reason to stay indoors by offering them opportunities to use their paws, nose, and brains; keep them busy! A cat's greatest instinctual need is the chance to explore and hunt. Providing vertical space using cat trees and shelving will drastically increase the size of your home in your cat's eyes. Hide treats in these novel spaces to encourage them to explore and use their senses like an outdoor cat would. You can also provide window perches and hang a bird feeder right outside the window to provide your cat with hours of visual enrichment (aka kitty television) provided this doesn't cause your cat to become frustrated.



Cats out in the wild use their energy to hunt for their next meal but since most indoor cats have meal time set up for them, their prospects for a stimulating day are limited. Consider incorporating puzzle feeders to their feeding regimen to make them work for their food. Not only do they keep pets mentally and physically stimulated, it's a delicious, fun, and engaging activity. You can purchase puzzle feeders in pet stores or make your own out of regular household items. This link: <https://www.purina.com/articles/cat/feeding/diy-cat-puzzle-feeder> provides several DIY examples.

Having regular interactive play sessions simulates hunting and helps release any excess energy your cat may have. Wand-type toys are great because they allow for vigorous, stimulating exercise and will surely keep your cat entertained. Play therapy will also strengthen the bond between you and your cat. Give your cat a few treats or even a small meal after play time so they reap the rewards of their "hunt". If your cat's needs are being met indoors, it may help them forget about going outdoors. Please see our, "Environmental Enrichment" flyer for more information.

Door Darting Strategy

Your cat may not immediately forget about the wonders of the outdoors, even if you've modified your home to keep them busy. They may still be attracted to what's outside, so it's important to make a plan with your whole family to prevent door darting, until they've gotten used to the new routine you've set up for them. A baby gate or something similar is also useful to help create an extra barrier by the door.

Most cat parents tend to greet their cat as soon as they come home, but this habit could be potentially dangerous because it might give them the opportunity to slip out. Make the door a place where your cat doesn't get any attention. Ignore your cat and greet them in an area away from the entrance. You can set up an official hello-and-goodbye spot on the other side of the room. Call their name to this spot, and then reward them with a treat whenever they go there. Before you leave, call them to this spot and say goodbye by offering them an irresistible treat. Toss a few extra treats next to him when you leave so he's busy eating as you're opening the door. Your goal is to have them focus on this special treat instead of following you to the door. A puzzle feeder will also do the trick. You can portion out their daily meals by placing a couple of puzzle feeders in different areas of your home before you head out. When you come in through the door, do not look at your cat or greet them until you walk over to that official hello-and-goodbye spot. Keep treats nearby in a container so you can reward them when they go to that spot, and then you can give your cat lots of attention.

If your cat loves laser pointers, keep one by the door. When you're getting ready to leave, distract them with the laser pointer and get them going off in the opposite direction to chase the red dot. This will allow you to slip out the door without worrying about your cat bolting out. You can even direct the laser to a hidden puzzle feeder as an added bonus for chasing it.

Other Alternatives

If you're able, consider setting up a catio. A catio is an enclosed outdoor space where your cat can walk around freely. You can build a catio on your terrace or in your yard. Both you and your cat can enjoy the space together. You can also look into cat fencing, a travel cat bag, or a cat stroller. There are lots of methods to give your cat the opportunity to safely smell and hear the world.



Last Resort for Determined Door Darting Cats

If your cat is still insistent on trying to bolt out as soon as you open the door, in spite of trying all of the options above, there is a last resort deterrent to help them see that nothing good happens at the front door. When it comes to weighing the risks of a cat running out, potentially getting hurt, and other attempts at training doesn't seem to be working, then a pet-safe spray deterrent might do the trick. The spray deterrent has a motion sensor, so any pet who walks near this device will trigger a short burst of air. The noise will spook your cat a bit, but they'd think twice before going near the door again. Here is a link to purchase one: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B000RIA95G>.

Resources:

<https://www.wikihow.com/Keep-a-Cat-from-Running-out-the-Door>

<https://www.catbehaviorassociates.com/how-to-introduce-your-cat-to-puzzle-feeders/>

For more information:

International Association of Animal Behavior Consultants: <https://m.iaabc.org/>

Certified Applied Animal Behaviorists: <http://corecaab.org/>