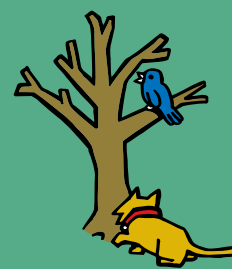


Make sure your cat naps when you do.



When a cat is allowed to roam outdoors at night, the results can be serious...

The domestic cat in our community

Cats are highly valued pets in Australia; around 23% of households own them. They adapt well to our life styles, and are great companions for people who live in high density areas.

However, serious problems can occur if cats are allowed to roam outdoors between dusk and dawn.

Around eighty percent of accidents involving cats happen at night. Roaming cats can get hit by cars, injured in fights, catch fatal diseases (eg feline AIDS) or become lost. Cats kept inside at night generally live at least three times longer than cats allowed to roam!

The hours between dusk and dawn are also when cats are most likely to kill native wildlife; even well fed cats will hunt. Cats can annoy neighbours at night too, by spraying, fighting, yowling and digging in gardens.

Legal requirements for cat owners

If your cat is found wandering off your property and is not identified, it can be seized and impounded. You may have to pay a fine when reclaiming it from the pound.

If your cat wanders onto another person's property more than once, it may be seized and impounded. Council may issue an order to stop your cat trespassing, and if you don't comply you may be fined.

Some councils require cats to be confined to their owner's property during certain hours. Others prohibit or restrict cats in some places. Check with your local council to see if these requirements apply in your area.

Confine your cat

You can protect your cat and our wildlife, and avoid problems with neighbours, by confining your cat at night.

Confining your cat to the property is also the best way to avoid legal action.

Contrary to popular belief, cats don't have to roam. Providing their basic needs are met, cats can enjoy longer and healthier lives when confined at night or even twenty four hours a day.

Where to confine your cat

Simply keep your cat in the house or flat with you, or in the garage or shed at night.

Other options include a buying or building a "cat enclosure" for your yard, or installing "cat proof fencing". Look under "Pet Shops' Suppliers" in the Yellow Pages for companies that sell enclosures and netting.

If you're handy and would like to save money, visit www.pets.dpi.vic.gov.au to download the free booklet "How to build cat proof fencing and cat enclosures" (if you don't have internet access, call 136 186 for mail order). Along with the traditional cat enclosures, the booklet provides instructions for building 'cat proof fencing'. This involves modifying existing fences to make them 'cat proof', giving cats free access to the yard. The booklet includes step by step DIY instructions with supporting illustrations and photos. It also provides guidelines on how to enrich the environment of cats so they remain happy and healthy when contained to the property.

How to confine your cat at night

When training your cat to accept confinement, skip its morning feed and call it in at night to be fed. Don't feed your cat until it comes inside – it will learn quickly that it won't get fed unless home by dusk. Once inside, don't let it out again until morning.

Ensure your cat has a cosy and well ventilated sleeping area, with food, water and a litter tray. Your cat should adapt to night confinement within a few days. If not, get further advice from your vet.

How to confine your cat for longer periods

If you wish, you can gradually extend the time your cat spends indoors or in an enclosure. When confining cats for long periods you must enrich their environment. This will prevent them from getting bored or having behavioural problems.

Give your cat plenty of companionship (from yourself or another pet), and exercise through play. You can even train cats to walk outside on a harness and leash! Provide climbing and scratching posts, toys (eg scrunched paper or balls), and hiding places (eg cardboard boxes).

If your cat is not in an outdoor enclosure, ensure it can access window ledges for sunshine, or place a chair near a window. You can also give your cat grass to chew (non toxic varieties such as oats, wheat, rye-grass).

For more advice or information

Call your local council if you have questions about your rights and responsibilities as a cat owner, or if you have lost your cat. Your council will also deal with concerns about wandering or nuisance cats.

Advice is also available from animal welfare shelters, vets and cat clubs. Visit **www.pets.dpi.vic.gov.au** for contact details for such organisations, or call **136 186** for the cost of a local call.

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