

INFORMATION ON CAT FLAPS

AND HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CAT TO USE ONE

WHY ARE CAT FLAPS IMPORTANT FOR CATS?

- Access to a garden and the outdoors can provide a huge amount of positive stimulation for your cat, and well as keep them physically fit and healthy.
- Cat flaps are the best way to provide your cat with regular access to the outdoors when they need it, particularly if you are out during the day or in the evening.
- Cats like to feel as 'in control' of their environment as possible. Therefore, by allowing them to come and go as they please (via a cat flap), rather than them having to 'ask' to be let in or out, is likely to help them feel more relaxed and happy.

WHICH CAT FLAP IS BEST?

There are several main types of cat flap that you can get for your cat. These include:

Manually operated – This is the most basic type of cat flap and opens when your cat pushes against it. Unfortunately, this type of flap offers access to all cats that try to use it, making it very difficult to stop unwanted cats from coming in to the home, particularly if you live in an area with a high population of cats, so this type of cat flap may not be ideal.

Magnet and infra-red operated – These types of cat flaps are operated via a magnet or infrared device attached to your cat's collar. When the collar is within reading distance of the cat flap, the device will unlock the flap, allowing your cat access. These cat flaps may help to deter unwanted cats from getting in, however, any cat wearing a similar device on their collar may also be able to enter (i.e. if your neighbour also uses a magnet operated flap for their cat). Some cats may also be able to force their way through these flaps, even if they are not wearing the necessary device on their collar.

Microchip operated – These types of cat flaps are operated via your cat's individual microchip. When your cat's chip is in range of the chip reader, the cat flap will automatically open, allowing them access. This type of cat flap offers the best method to stop unwanted cats from entering your house because the flap will only open for cats with the specific microchip numbers that you have pre-programmed the chip reader to respond to. The cat flap is able to remember a number of different microchip numbers so is also suitable for use in multi cat homes.

HOW TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CAT TO USE A CAT FLAP

Many cats will quickly work out how to use the cat flap, but some may need a bit more encouragement.

Firstly, it's important to make sure that your cat has been carefully settled into your home, and also introduced to the outside.

It's also a good idea to make sure the garden or outside space is safe and also appealing for your cat by providing them with lots of places to explore as well as go to hide or get up high. This way they are more likely to use the cat flap, and feel relaxed and comfortable doing so.

Please see the following for further advice on how to settle them in to the home ([How to settle your new cat in to the home](#)), how to introduce them to the outside ([How to introduce your cat to the outside](#)) as well as how to make your garden or outside space 'cat-friendly and enriching' ([How to make your garden or outside space cat-friendly and enriching for your cat](#)).

If your cat is a little reluctant to use the cat flap but is generally confident and friendly, the following approach may work well:

- Start by fixing the cat flap in an 'open' position using a clothes peg or similar that can be clipped to the side of the cat flap to wedge it open.
- If you have a microchip cat flap you will initially need to programme it before your cat can use it.
- Choose a quiet time when it is not busy in the home, stand by the cat flap and encourage your cat to come to you, offering them one of their favourite treats.
- Next place a few of their treats on the floor, directly in front of the cat flap. Repeat this several times. If your cat is readily eating the treats you can then place a few on the bottom edge of the cat flap itself. Repeat this several times.
- If your cat seems comfortable, you can then go outside (leaving your cat indoors) and place treats on the floor near to the cat flap, also placing a few more on the bottom edge of the cat flap as before.
- You can then sit outside and call gently and encouragingly to your cat. Be sure to sit a distance away from the cat flap so that you're not blocking your cat's view of the outside through the cat flap.
- If your cat comes through the cat flap out in to the garden, reward them with another treat.
- When your cat is outside, you could then alternate the above process by going and sitting inside the house and gently calling to them to come to you through the cat flap.
- If your cat is shy or nervous, they may want to get used to the cat flap in their own time. In this case, simply leave the cat flap wedged open as above and let your cat explore/use the cat flap when they are ready.
- You can also place some treats on the floor, directly in front of the cat flap,

as well as on bottom edge of the flap. However, if you are worried about unwanted cats coming in to the house if the flap is left open, you may want to avoid using treats and keep a close eye on the cat flap area to make sure other cats aren't trying to enter.

- Once you feel your cat is going in and out through the cat flap comfortably, you can remove the peg so that the cat flap is back in the closed position.

SHOULD I RESTRICT WHEN THEY CAN GO OUTSIDE (E.G. BY LOCKING THE CAT FLAP AT NIGHT?)

- Because different cats may have different preferences for when they like to be outside (i.e. some cats may like to be out at dusk and dawn, others during the day, some only when it's warm and sunny), it is ideal to provide them with unrestricted access to the outdoors (i.e. via a cat flap), so that your cat can be outside when they need it or when they will enjoy it most.
- Many people may prefer to keep their cat in at night for fear of the cat not being safe out overnight. Whilst some cats will cope well with this, others may find this restriction stressful or frustrating because they may feel they are not able to go outdoors when they need to the most. It's therefore important to weigh up the potential risks of outdoor access overnight, against how much this may impact negatively on the welfare of the cat.
- If your cat prefers to toilet outside rather than indoors (as many cats do), giving them constant access to the outside is also important and may help to avoid possible house soiling problems.
- If you live in an area with a high population of neighbourhood cats, your cat may quickly need to get in to the habit of 'time sharing' their outdoor space with others to avoid conflict or fighting over specific resources (such as a prime bit of bare earth to toilet in, or a specific tree which offers a good vantage point). By allowing your cat constant access to the outside it will be much easier for them to work out 'when the coast is clear' and to venture out at those times. This will also help your cat to better avoid any 'bully' cats in the neighbourhood who may patrol in certain areas at specific times of the day.
- If you do decide to keep the cat flap locked at certain times (e.g. overnight) and you think your cat will cope well with this, make sure you provide them with a suitable litter tray to toilet in as well as things to keep them mentally occupied (such as puzzle feeders and toys – please see [How to make your home cat-friendly and enriching for your cat](#) for more information). If you find that they are very vocal over night when shut in, if they pace and paw or scratch at the cat flap or door to the outside, then they may not be coping well being confined inside and should ideally be given unrestricted outdoor access.

TOP TIP:

Never be tempted to physically pick up your cat and put them through the cat flap as they may find this stressful or unpleasant and then form a negative association with the cat flap

TOP TIP:

The safer and more 'cat friendly' your garden or outside space is, the more likely your cat may be to use her cat flap and want to venture outside. Please see advice sheet [How to make your garden or outside space cat-friendly and enriching for your cat](#) for more information.