

# Appendix 8

## Cat Flaps

Keeping a window slightly open is one way to allow your cat the freedom to come and go as he pleases but this could be a potential security risk. Another option is that you act as doorman, opening and closing the door whenever your cat wants to go out or come back indoors. But as well as being inconvenient for you, this could also be frustrating, even stressful, for your cat, especially if you are not around when he needs to go out to eliminate or to escape from threats or stressors, either within the home or outside. Fitting a cat flap can therefore be a good idea for both you and your cat.

But because cat flaps can potentially allow other cats into the house they can also be a source of stress for your cat. Where a cat flap is located, and the type of cat flap fitted, can make this much less of an issue.

### Where to Fit a Cat Flap

- Make sure that your cat has easy access to the cat flap from both indoors and outdoors. Your cat maybe agile now, but in years to come climbing or leaping up to reach the cat flap might be uncomfortable or difficult for him. Also, your cat might need to get through the flap quickly and easily if he is being chased or is frightened by something outside. If the cat flap can only be fitted somewhere off the ground, provide a ramp or steps for easy access.
- Fit the cat flap well away from the things that are important to your cat, such as food, water, and resting places. Food, or even a comfortable bed near the cat flap, may encourage other cats in through the cat flap and having important resources close to the cat flap, which will be perceived by your cat as a potential entry point for an intruder, can be very stressful for your cat.
- Litter trays should also be positioned well away from a cat flap. A cat can feel very vulnerable when using a litter tray and may be reluctant to use one that is located near to an entrance or exit, such as a doorway or cat flap.
- When venturing outside, a cat is leaving the safety and security of home and going out into a world where there could be dangers, such as other cats or neighbourhood dogs. A cat can therefore sometimes feel vulnerable when going outside through the cat flap, especially if he is going from a dimly lit environment into bright sunshine or from bright artificial light to darkness and thus might not be able to see very well for a few minutes. Providing him with somewhere to hide before venturing further can help to make him feel more secure. A good way to do this is to position bushy plants or similar close by the cat flap. Some plants can be toxic to cats, however, so it very important to ensure that the plants you choose are safe for your cat or kitten (information on potentially harmful indoor and outdoor plants can be accessed via International Cat Care: <https://icatcare.org/advice/poisonous-plants>).

Be wary of placing large solid objects nearby because these can provide a vantage point for other cats from which to ambush your cat as he comes out through the cat flap.

## Types of Cat Flap

The simplest type of cat flap is just a flap that your cat can push through (although some cats prefer to pull the flap open with a paw!). These are of course the easiest and cheapest to install; however, they do not prevent other cats from coming into your (and your cat's) home. So you may wish to fit an 'exclusive' cat flap, i.e. one that can only be used by your cat(s).

### Magnetic or infra-red operated

#### *Advantages*

- Relatively inexpensive and easy to fit.

#### *Disadvantages*

- Your cat will need to wear a collar that could cause injury to your cat if he gets caught up by it, or it could come off and be lost outside, thereby preventing your cat from using the cat flap and getting back in.
- The infra-red or magnetic locking devices are often not sufficient to prevent other cats from forcing their way in if they are strong and determined enough.

### Microchip activated

#### *Advantages*

- Your cat does not need to wear a collar. The cat flap works by reading a microchip embedded under your cat's skin.
- The locking device is usually stronger than infra-red or magnetic locking devices.
- Recent designs allow you to restrict the cat to one-way access for a set period of time as required and if you have more than one cat you can choose individual settings for each cat.

#### *Disadvantages*

- Often more expensive and depending on design may be a little more complicated to fit.
- Can only work if your cat has been microchipped (although some manufacturers can also supply a collar to activate the device).

- A microchip can sometimes migrate within the cat's body to a place where it cannot be picked up by the cat flap microchip reader, but this is a fairly rare occurrence. However, before purchasing a microchip-activated cat flap it can be a good idea to ask your vet or vet nurse/technician to check that your cat's microchip is still where it should be and can be read easily.

## Training Your Cat to Use a Cat Flap

You cannot fit a cat flap and expect your cat to use it straight away. He will need to learn what it is and how to use it. The simplest way to do this is to either prop open or remove the flap if possible, leaving a hole through which your cat can climb in and out. Then spend some time encouraging him back and forth, using a toy or some of his favourite treats and plenty of praise. At no time force him through the gap as this will only deter him from using it. Leave it propped open and give him time to get used to it.

Once he is fully confident going in and out through the open gap, drop down/replace the flap, but, if possible, with any locking mechanism switched off so that it can be opened without waiting for the collar or microchip to be read. Then once again encourage him back and forth with treats and praise. Once he is regularly going in and out by pushing open the flap, allow him a few days to become fully accustomed to it before activating the locking mechanism.

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