Every now and then, on nice days, Krista Rakovan would let her cats onto the back deck for some supervised sunbathing. She watched how much Julius, Ginger and Kobe loved lying in the sun—the only time they were permitted outside—and she thought about how she could add more variety to their lives.

“I wanted to give my cats the outdoor experience,” says the HSUS web specialist. But she had some concerns: “not only keeping them safe, but keeping them off my neighbor’s property and keeping the wildlife safe.”

So Rakovan’s father built a catio—a patio or screened-in porch intended for cats—onto a corner of the house. She wanted the catio for enrichment, but the time outdoors also has reduced conflict between Kobe, who can be a bully, and the other cats. (Rakovan places a small collapsible mesh cat tent on the deck to let Julius and Ginger enjoy the fresh air without running into Kobe.)

Many types of cats can benefit from an outdoor enclosure, including “door dashers, escape artists, alley cat adventurers, fighting tomatos, serial bird killers [and] wishful window watchers,” says Seattle catio designer Cynthia Chomos. And, of course, devout sun worshippers like her 2-year-old orange tabby, Serena.

Using her experience as a general contractor and her background in feng shui and color design, Chomos built two enclosures: a small window box where Serena spends her afternoons and a large catio for them to enjoy together. “I wanted to keep her safe, healthy and happy, and really provide her with an enriching outdoor experience,” says Chomos, who was sitting in that space with Serena one day when she decided to turn her ideas into a business called Catio Spaces.

Some people picture an unsightly wire cage attached to their house, Chomos says, but the trend’s rapid growth in the past few years has yielded more and more options according to design preferences, budget and skill.

Rakovan’s father is a handyman, so with other family members pitching in, they completed her roomy enclosure in a weekend. Creating happiness for indoor cats can be as simple as that pop-up kitty tent or a window box, or it can be as elaborate as a room with a floor, a roof and furniture for people and pets. Prices can vary quite a bit, but there’s likely something within just about everyone’s range—and a fit for most homes, be it a large house or small apartment.

—allanimals@humanesociety.org
Before You Get Started

With so many choices and things to consider, finding the right catio can be overwhelming. Ask yourself these questions before you begin.

**What Do You Want From a Catio?**
Do you want to enrich the lives of your indoor cats? Create a haven for feral or "personality challenged" cats who don't get along with other feline family members? Provide a fresh-air extension of your living space for both people and cats?

**What Is Your Budget?**
Prices can range from under $100 to thousands of dollars. The more you spend, in general, the more comfortable and larger the structure will be. Kits tend to be more expensive, but buying a kit may be a good option if you lack carpentry skills.

**What Can Your Home Accommodate?**
Do you want something directly accessible from the house, through a window or a door? Or something freestanding? How much yard space can you devote to the catio?
Before building your catio, get permission if needed—preferably in writing. If you are a renter, check with your landlord or management company. In some cases, you’ll need a permit from your city or homeowners association. Another good step: Make sure everyone in your home is on board with the idea.

Cats are great climbers—and sometimes even wily diggers—so make your catio escape-proof. There should be no openings he could squeeze through, even on the top. Also avoid anything that he could catch his collar on or get stuck in.

As much as you want to keep your cat in her catio, remember that you also want to keep other animals out. So ensure that your catio frame is strong and all components are firmly attached. If there are coyotes, bears or other large predators in your area, a catio may not be right for you, unless it’s extremely sturdy.

Pick a quiet time to finally introduce your cat to his new catio. Give him time to explore at his own pace. Catnip sprinkled on pet furniture, or treats scattered here and there, will help your cat realize that this new space is all his.

Follow our checklist to create the purrfect outdoor space for you and your cat.

- **MATERIALS.** Choose a plan that uses wood, metal or other sturdy, nontoxic materials.
- **FLOOR.** Decide whether you want to build directly on grass, sand or dirt (which some cats might be tempted to use as a litter box) or construct a floor.
- **ROOF.** Make sure the roof is strong enough to handle any snowfall you might get in your area.
- **PERCHES.** A catio is a great place to put a cat tree; some feature shelves or other scratching or climbing structures. You can also install a cat hammock, cat wheel or other fun pet furniture that you may not have room for indoors.
- **WATER.** Include a bowl of fresh water (especially important on warm days).
- **LITTER BOX.** Provide a litter box, or easy access to the inside of your house, to avoid unfortunate messes.
- **ROOM FOR YOU.** If you’d like to spend time in the catio, too, make sure there’s a human-sized door and space for a chair, side table, lamp—whatever you want for your own comfort.
- **PROTECTION FROM THE ELEMENTS.** Your kitty will need ventilation in warm weather and a cozy place to retreat from the cold, rain and sun.
- **SUPERVISION.** Always supervise your cat in the catio. Build it where you can see it from your home, and consider adding lights if your cat will have nighttime access.
If you have limited time or minimal carpentry tools and skills, you still have plenty of options for building a catio. Keep costs down by repurposing other materials with some online DIY inspiration, or go the kit route if you’re willing to pay more for convenience and craft.

**Cat and Caboodle**
**COST:** Varies; starting at about $40
Comprising wire storage cubes and cable ties, this enclosure can be configured in almost any shape or size, freestanding or attached to a house. You can build it on your own, and it’s easy to relocate.

**Shelving Enclosure**
**COST:** Varies; can start at under $300
Marva Marrow shares instructions for building catios of various sizes from zip ties and carpet-covered ventilated shelving. It took Marrow less than two hours to build hers.

**Dog Kennel “Dream Catio”**
**COST:** Varies; initial cost estimated at $360, plus bird netting
Catster.com author Marci Kladnik used dog kennel panels and bird netting to build a structure that encloses a patio and wraps around the house. She added used items such as a playhouse for accessories. There are no precise instructions, so you’ll need a little imagination.

**Safe Kitty**
**COST:** $539
This 36-foot-square, three-sided kit uses Maine white cedar and wire mesh, and it can enclose a window. You need only a wrench and screwdriver for assembly.

**Purrfect Penthouse**
**COST:** $1,095
This enclosure from Purrfect Fence is 7½ feet wide, 15 feet long and 6 feet tall. It features lots of space for cat trees and litter boxes, and it can be either freestanding or attached to a house.

**CatsOnDeck**
**COST:** $595-$3,850
Consisting of panels that can be snapped together, these kits range from a simple “budget” version to a two-tower, five-level “Kitty Kastle.” Accessories include lofts, litter box modules, pet door attachments and shelves.

**Cages By Design**
**COST:** $1,250-$4,740
These pricey but handsome kits come in a range of sizes; you can also purchase cat trees, shelves, catwalks and window connector kits as add-ons. The kits should be installed on concrete pavers or slabs or wood decks.

Catio Spaces offers a window box kit ($650) that attaches to siding or window trim. The company also designs larger catios (next page).
If you have more tools, a little bit of construction experience and a spare weekend, these companies offer blueprints for catio projects of various configurations and sizes. You will need to purchase the materials separately and rent or borrow a truck (if you don’t have one) to haul them.

**Just4Cats**  
**COST:** $24 for the plan; material prices will vary  
This plan details instructions for assembling 8-foot-square wood-frame modules attached to chicken wire. Instructions are included for mounting tree stumps and adding tunnels.

**Catio Designs**  
**COST:** $49.95 for the plan; roughly $65-$325 for materials, depending on size  
These plans provide a range of designs from a small window unit to a 16-by-16-foot freestanding structure. Steps include purchasing materials such as lumber and chicken wire and digging postholes.

**Catio Spaces**  
**COST:** $49.99 for the plan and roughly $500 for materials for an 8-by-10-by-8-foot plan  
This Seattle-based company offers plans for freestanding enclosures and three-sided catios that can attach to your house. It also sells window box kits (pictured on page 29) and will install ground-level catios for Seattle-area clients. Catio Spaces donates $5 to an animal welfare organization for each plan purchased.
If you are creative and comfortable with tools, you are limited only by your choice of materials and the room you have. You could buy a plan to follow or create one on your own.

**With some elbow grease**, Jennifer Hillman built a catio for her five cats at her Seattle home. After some brainstorming, she and her sister installed a cat door into a side window, laid a patio with bricks and pavers, sunk fence posts, enclosed the top and sides with chicken wire and created a wire tunnel. They later added a ledge and a small staircase, and eventually built a second catio—replacing an old shed with a freestanding enclosure large enough for Hillman to enjoy, too. There's even a fountain outside the space that attracts birds to enhance the kitties' outdoor experience.

A catio is a great way to protect birds and wildlife—and be a good neighbor—while providing cats with the sunshine, fresh air, sights, sounds and stimulation that they love, says Hillman, HSUS senior director of strategic advocacy and campaigns, who helped launch Catio Tour Seattle to inform and inspire residents. “And, it can be a great little addition to any garden or yard space, giving it a unique look.”