Catios

Happy Cats, Safe Wildlife

Thanks for visiting The Catio at Wildlife Images! When it comes to these structures, there's no one-size-fits-all solution. Catios can be as simple as a window box with just enough room for your cat to lounge or a more elaborate space with tunnels and plenty of places to perch. The point is, you can buy or build a cat house in a variety of shapes and sizes. There are several factors to consider when choosing a location for your catio. Prior to building your cat enclosure, consider the following:

- **Cat Access**: The ideal location for a catio is near an exterior window or door with easy access for your cat to enter directly into a catio. Cat doors, available in a variety of sizes and styles, can be installed in a window, door or a wall.
- **Size**: Evaluate how much outdoor space you have available and how many cats will use the catio. Cats love vertical space so you can maximize a small area by adding several vertical shelves and perches.
- **Sun/Shade**: Cats love basking in the sun so a location that offers both sun and shade is ideal. Always provide shade for your cat such as shade cloth, a bench or cat shelter while outdoors.

- **Stimulating Views**: Cats need stimulation on a daily basis. A catio location with views of a garden, wildlife and family activities will provide endless enrichment for your cat while enjoying fresh air.
- **Cat Toys and Cat Scratchers:** Add your cat's favorite toys, a cat scratcher, tunnel tube or other enrichment for your cat's enjoyment.
- **Cat Safe Plants:** To keep your cat healthy, avoid using plants that are toxic to cats. Several safe plant choices include wheat grass, catnip, basil, nasturtiums, pansies or grass planted in a pot.
- **Water Bowl or Fountain:** Always have a bowl of fresh water available for your cat in a catio or consider a water fountain. (Avoid food that can attract rodents or unwanted critters.)

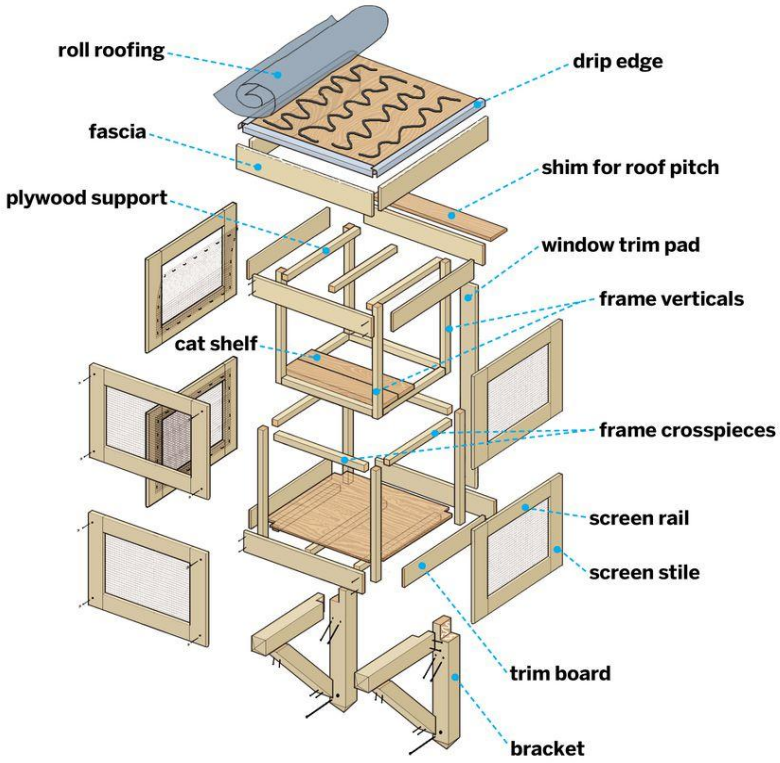
DIY Catio

This Old House

Senior technical editor Mark Powers, of This Old House, built this two-story version, complete with a shelf for perching, over two days using rot-resistant cedar, in a look and color that match the home's architecture.

Follow along to learn how to create a window catio that's sure to get your cat to come out from behind the couch.

- Skill Level: Moderate
- Cost: $490
- Time: 2 days
- Tools & Materials



- Ladder
- Pencil
- Tape measure
- Mini paint roller
- Paint brush
- Miter saw
- Drill/driver
- Jigsaw
- Staple gun
- Utility knife
- Tin snips
- Caulk gun
- Circular saw
- Hammer
- Chisel
- Level
- Clamps
- paddle bit - 3/8-inch

Step 1 - Overview: How to Build a Catio

Day-to-day timeline

- **SATURDAY** Build the frames (Steps 2–12).
- **SUNDAY** Attach the catio to the window (Steps 13-19).

Cut List

- 2x2 verticals for upper and lower catio frames: eight @ 36 inches
- 2x2 side crosspieces for upper and lower catio frames: four @ 31½ inches
- 2x2 front crosspieces for upper and lower catio frames: four @ 37 inches
- 2x2 plywood supports for upper and lower catio frames: six @ 31½ inches
- 1x4 side trim boards: four @ 34¼ inches
- 1x4 front and back trim boards: four @ 40 inches
- 1x4 window trim pads: two @ 64¾ inches
- 1x4 front screen rails for frames: four @ 40⅛ inches
- 1x4 side screen rails for frames: eight @ 35¼ inches
- 1x4 front screen stiles for all frames: twelve @ 32⅛ inches
- 1x4 sides for roof fascia: two @ 41¼ inches
- 1x4 front for roof fascia: one @ 46 inches
- ¼ plywood roof deck: one @ 42 x 46 inches
- ¼ plywood floor deck: one @ 34½ x 38½ inches, notched
- 4x4 pressure-treated pine bracket legs: four @ 29 inches, ends beveled
- 4x4 pressure-treated pine diagonal braces: two @ 22 inches to the long points with 45-degree angled ends

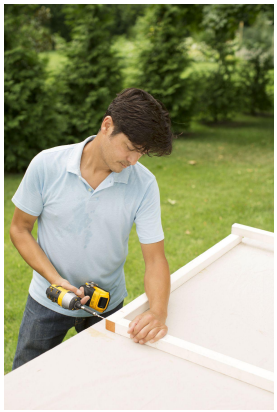
Step 2 - Make a Story Stick

To determine the height of the catio, mark the location of the windowsill and the head casing on a long board. Then measure the width from the outside edges of the side casings. Each of the two catio frames is about as tall as the window's sashes and wide enough to rest on the side casings.

Step 3 - Prime and Cut the Parts

Coat all the cedar 2x2 balusters and 1x4 boards for the project with a tannin-blocking exterior primer. Once dry, cut the parts for the catio frames and window screens with a miter saw according to the cut list.

Step 4 - Build Frames for the Sides



Using 2x2s, butt joints, and 2¼ -inch stainless-steel screws, attach a frame crosspiece between two verticals, making a U shape, as shown. At the open end of the U, attach a 2x2 plywood support on top of the verticals. Repeat this step to make the three remaining sides, and coat any newly exposed ends with primer.

Step 5 - Add the Trim Boards

Using 1 5⁄8-inch stainless-steel screws, attach 1x4 trim boards to the 2x2 sides, opposite the plywood supports. Stand the side frames up on edge and join them with front and back 1x4 trim boards. Drive screws through the trim boards and into the 2x2 verticals, as shown. Center an additional plywood support between the front and back trim boards. Repeat the process on the other frame.

Step 6 - Fasten Upper Crosspieces

To complete the frame, join the sides together at the top by screwing on 2x2s. Drive 1 5⁄8-inch fasteners through the top of the verticals and into the ends of the 2x2 crosspieces. Repeat the process on the other frame.

Step 7 - Make the Floor

Measure the interior dimensions of a frame and cut a sheet of plywood to fit. Trace a 2x2 onto each corner of the plywood and cut notches with a jigsaw. Test the fit, as shown, then remove the plywood, stain the bottom side, and set aside to install once the catio frames are mounted on the brackets.

Step 8 - Build the Screen Frames

For each screen frame, place 1x4 boards with the rails between the stiles. Glue joints together. Drill a pilot hole at an angle through the outside edge of a rail and into the adjoining stile, then drive a 2¼ -inch trim screw. Repeat at the remaining outside corners. Stand the frame up, drill an angled pilot hole through the rail and into the stile, as shown, at each inside corner, and follow with a screw.

Step 9 - Stretch the Screens

Cut an oversize piece of screening. Staple the screening to each of the six frames in this order, smoothing out any ripples before attaching: 12 to 6 o'clock, 3 to 9, 1 to 7, and so on, working around the frame. Cut any material that overhangs with a utility knife.

Step 10 - Assemble the Roof

Use 1 5⁄8-inch screws to join three lengths of fascia together with butt joints, creating a U shape. Then add glue to the top of the fascia boards, place the plywood roof, as shown, and attach it with more screws. Cut three lengths of aluminum drip edge to size with tin snips, then run a bead of roofing cement around the edge of the plywood, embed the front drip edge, and attach it with 1 5⁄8-inch screws. Next, add the side drip edge the same way, overlapping the front.

Step 11 - Attach the Roof

Position the upper frame with the trim boards facing up. To shed water, pitch the roof forward by screwing a scrap length of 1x4 on top of the frame's upper plywood supports flush with the rear trim board. Center the roof on the frame, flush with the back. Drive screws through the roof and into the upper plywood supports, as shown.

Step 12 - Unroll the Roofing

Spread roofing cement on the plywood, then unfurl the roll roofing onto the wet adhesive, pressing it in place. Take your time unrolling the roofing into the wet adhesive to avoid readjusting. Trim the asphalt to width so it just covers the aluminum drip caps.

Step 13 - Cut Half-lap Joints for the Brackets

We set our circular saw to a 40° angle and trimmed 1½ inches off each face to form decorative pyramids on the ends of the brackets. At the square ends, use a circular saw to make a series of passes 3½ inches wide and 1¾ inches deep. Knock the slivers free with a hammer and chisel, as shown. Repeat for the 2nd bracket.

Step 14 - Build the Brackets

Add construction adhesive to each side of the half-lap joint and fasten it together with a pair of 3-inch deck screws. Position the diagonal brace in place and drive 3-inch deck screws through the mitered ends and into the bracket. Repeat on the second bracket. Coat the exposed ends with primer.

Step 15 - Attach the Brackets

Position a bracket underneath the windowsill. Drill a shallow 3⁄8-inch pilot hole through the lower leg for the buttons that hide the screwheads. Then attach the bracket to the house with a 9-inch structural screw, as shown. Check for plumb with a level, then toe-screw through both sides of the bracket's half-lap joint and into the house with two more structural screws. Repeat to attach the second bracket.

Step 16 - Join the Frames

With a helper, stack and center the catio frames on the brackets. Clamp the frames together, then fasten through the crosspieces of the upper frame into the lower one with 2¼-inch screws every 10 inches, but don't seat them fully just yet. Use 1 5⁄8-inch screws to attach 1x4s to the back edges of the joined frame, between the trim boards, to pad out the window casing. Drive 3-inch deck screws through the lower frame's plywood supports and into the brackets. Add the floor and screw it to the supports.

Step 17 - Connect the Frame to the House

Using a level, check that the catio frame is plumb and level. Measure for a consistent space between the upper and lower trim boards, where the screen frames will fit. Adjust for racking by adding shims between the catio frames before tightening the screws holding them together. Attach the cat shelf to the lower crosspieces of the upper frame with 1 5⁄8-inch screws. Then attach the frame to the house by driving 3-inch deck screws through the 2x2s and into the window trim every 10 inches.

Step 18 - Tip in the Screened Side Panels

Using a 3⁄8-inch paddle bit, drill shallow pilot holes for button plugs in each corner of a screen panel. Put the screen in place, mesh facing inside, with the front edge flush to the outside corner of the catio frame.

Step 19 - Screw Screens in Place

Drive the four screws holding each panel in place. Press in the button plugs. Repeat the installation process for the screens on the other side of the catio and then the front. Now coat everything with stain.