



Search Checklist for Lost Outdoor-Access Cats

There are many reasons that an outdoor-access cat may go missing from their home. When a cat is injured or scared, their natural instinct is to hide and remain silent. Even if you have an inseparable bond with your cat, do not expect them to come out or meow when you search and call their name. Some cats will, but many cats are too frightened to do so. Even if you cannot find your cat with repeated searches, it is very likely that they are still out there somewhere. Do not give up hope!

Probable Causes of Disappearance

Consider these possible causes for your cat's disappearance to help guide your search (most common are underlined).

- Trapped Displaced (scared away from home or wandered away) Injured or ill and hiding
- Deceased (most often hit by car) Rescued (taken in by someone who thought they were stray)
- Attacked by predator Unintentional Transport (accidentally transported in a vehicle)
- Intentional Disposal (taken by someone and dumped or given away) Stolen

1. How to Conduct a Thorough Physical Search

A. Search Within Your Home

If you are not sure that your cat is lost outside, then search within your own home thoroughly. Do not expect your cat to respond to your voice if they are sick, injured or trapped somewhere.

- Search within the first 1-2 days or as soon as possible if you have not already done so.
- If there is any chance your cat is inside, repeat search at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will finally meow after being trapped or hiding for this long. Some cats have survived being trapped for several weeks.

B. Search Outside Your Home and the Surrounding Area

Search all potential hiding spots on your property and up to 3-5 houses (or 500 ft to ¼ mile) from your house in all directions. Make sure to get the property owners' permission before doing this.

- Do this immediately, in case your cat is trapped or injured and hiding.
- Get permission to search in any structure that was open when your cat went missing, such as sheds, garages, crawl spaces or basements in case they have become trapped. Also check under porches, sheds and decks with a flashlight since an injured or sick cat may hide and not respond to your voice.
- If there was any location you could not thoroughly search, such as a full shed, repeat your search at these locations at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will respond after being hidden for this long.

C. Hire a Search Dog

- If you are potentially interested in hiring a search dog team, then read this article so you know what to expect: lostpetresearch.com/resources/search-dogs. Only a small percentage of cats are found using a search dog.

2. How to Conduct EFFECTIVE Advertising

A. Create and Post Well-Designed Posters

This is one of the most important things you can do! Pet detectives report a success of anywhere from 40-90% with well-made posters.

- Check for any town bylaws stating where and how signs may be legally posted.
- Start with posters in your immediate neighborhood and up to 1 mile.
- Expand posters 2-3 miles if there are no sightings. Farther in rural areas.
- Posters are easiest to read if placed where cars must slow down or stop.
- Your phone number and cat's picture must be large enough that they can be easily seen and read by someone sitting in a car or driving. Also include a very brief description of your cat and the date he went missing or was last seen.



B. Is Your Cat's Microchip Up-to-Date?

- If your cat is microchipped, make sure that the microchip is registered, and your contact information is up-to-date. Contact the microchip company and see if they provide additional lost pet support.

C. Distribute Flyers

Flyers should be hand-delivered or placed in locations where people walk. Explain that your cat may be trapped or injured and hiding in fear, and ask people to check their property for any sign of your lost cat. **Flyers should not be used in place of posters where people are driving. This is the most frequent mistake that people make!**

- Start by distributing flyers in your immediate neighborhood and up to ¼ mile.
- Flyers may also be distributed in areas of potential sightings.
- Post flyers at any local businesses, parks, pet supply stores, gas stations, and the library and post office.
- Give flyers to anyone who regularly works in your neighborhood, such as the mailman and newspaper delivery.

D. Contact and Visit Shelters and Rescue Groups

- Find a list of all the shelters and rescue groups in the area: lostpetresearch.com/resources/shelters_rescue_groups.
- Visit and provide a copy of your flyer. Ask to see all cats and not just those on the adoption floor. If you cannot visit, at least submit a lost pet report. Don't skip this step even if your cat is microchipped.
- Find out how long they hold new cats before putting them up for adoption, and visit at least this often.

E. Animal Control, Vets and Department of Public Works

- Contact your local Animal Control Officer and find out if they pick up stray cats. Submit a lost pet report.
- Contact all local vets and your closest emergency vets and give them a copy of your flyer.
- Cars rather than predators are often the greatest danger to lost cats. Find out who in your town picks up deceased animals and if they check cats for microchips/ID tags. This may be the Department of Public Works.

F. Post Lost Pet Ads

Only a small percentage of lost indoor-cats are found through online posting, but it is still an important step.

- Post online ads on local sites such as craigslist, NextDoor.com and any local newspapers.
- Post your cat to online databases. For a list of recommended sites see: lostpetresearch.com/online-posting
- Post on your Facebook page and share with any local nonprofit and "Community" pages for lost or stray pets.
- Check online (petfinder.com) and in newspapers for any found, adoptable or for sale cats that might be yours.

3. How to Check Sightings and Catch Your Cat

A. Checking Sightings

If found away from home, your cat may not respond to your calls. If you don't see your cat, do the following:

- Get as much info as possible about the sighting. Show them additional photos of your cat or a "photo line-up."
- Talk with neighbors and distribute flyers. Find out if anyone else has seen the cat or owns a similar looking cat.
- Revisit the sighting location in the early morning or evening when more cats are active. Bring binoculars.
- Consider using a wildlife camera and feeding station to verify that your cat is in the area.

See: lostpetresearch.com/lost-pet-resources/surveillance

B. Catching Your Cat

If found away from home, your cat may be too frightened to approach you. Be patient and do not chase them.

- Be prepared! Always have some food, a towel and a cat carrier in case you see your cat.
- Consider setting a humane trap if you locate your cat but they will not approach you.

See: lostpetresearch.com/lost-pet-resources/trapping

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This is only a very brief list of search actions. There is much more that you could be doing to find your lost cat! Visit Lost Pet Research & Recovery (LostPetResearch.com) for additional lost cat resources and professional search and recovery services. If you received this checklist from anyone other than Lost Pet Research and Recovery, please visit our website to ensure that you have the most up-to-date version. If you would like to distribute this checklist, please submit a Contact Form to request permission.