



# Search Checklist for Lost Outdoor-Access Cats Lost From Home

There are many reasons that an outdoor-access cat may go missing from his 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 him to come out or meow when you search and call his name. Some cats will, but far more cats are too frightened to do so. Even if you cannot find your cat with repeated searches, it is very likely that he is 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     Displacement (scared away from home or left on their own)     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. 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.

- 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 trapped, repeat search at least once after 7-10 days. Some cats will respond after being trapped for this long.

### B. Search Outside Your Home and the Surrounding Area:

Search all potential hiding spots on property 3-5 houses (or 500 ft – 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 or basements. Cars are a serious danger to outdoor-access cats, and only 25% of cats are killed when hit. Check with a flashlight under porches, sheds, decks and bushes in front and backyards.
- 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. 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/](http://lostpetresearch.com/resources/search-dogs/). Less than 20% of lost cats are found using a search dog.

## 2. Advertising

### A. Posters

**Creating and posting effective lost pet posters 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.
- 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. Microchip

- If your cat is microchipped, contact the company and inform them that your cat is missing. Also make sure that your phone number and address on file are up-to-date.

### C. 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.
- 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.
- You can also work directly with your post office to have your flyers mailed.

### D. Shelters and Rescue Groups

Locate all local shelters and rescue groups (try [www.petfinder.com/animal-shelters-and-rescues/search/](http://www.petfinder.com/animal-shelters-and-rescues/search/)).

- Visit and provide a copy of your flyer. If you cannot visit, at least submit a lost pet report.
- Ask to see all cats, including those not on the adoption floor.
- 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.
- 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.
- Contact all local vets and your closest emergency vet and give them a copy of your flyer.

### F. Post Lost Pet Ads

- Post online classifieds with local newspapers.
- Post online ads on craigslist in *Pets* and *Lost & Found*, and repost weekly.
- Post your cat on [www.lostmykitty.com](http://www.lostmykitty.com), [www.helpinglostpets.com](http://www.helpinglostpets.com), and [www.tabbytracker.com](http://www.tabbytracker.com)
- Many local papers will post a small lost pet ad for free. However, a larger ad with photo is more effective.
- Post on social networking sites, such as Facebook. Also check for any "Community" pages for lost pets.
- Check online and in newspapers for any "found" or "for sale" ads that could be your cat.

## 3. Trapping & Surveillance

### A. Humane Traps

- Borrow or purchase a humane trap or two. These may be needed if your cat is found far from home and is too frightened to approach you.

### B. Surveillance

- Trapping or feeding stations (i.e. food placed out for your lost cat) are more effective if used in conjunction with some form of surveillance, such as a trail camera. These are also useful to help verify potential sightings.

### C. Leave a Way for your Cat to Come Home

- If possible, leave a way for your cat to return home, such as an open porch, garage or window. About 30% of lost cats will return home on their own, and they will frequently arrive in the middle of the night.

*Release of Liability: Lost Pet Research & Recovery accepts no liability for the consequences of any actions taken on the basis of information provided in this checklist. By reading and using this checklist, you are releasing Lost Pet Research & Recovery and the distributors of this plan from all liability and accepting full responsibility for the search for your lost cat.*

**This is only a very brief list of search actions. There is much more that you could be doing to find your lost cat!** For professional help, contact Lost Pet Research & Recovery (413) 539-3530 or [LostPetResearch.com](http://LostPetResearch.com). Lost Pet Research & Recovery offers lost cat phone consultations and on-site support (in New England), such as a cat detection dog, rental of humane traps and trail cameras, assistance trapping, and creation of highly-effective lost pet posters and flyers. For more information on lost cat behavior, visit Missing Pet Partnership [www.MissingPetPartnership.org](http://www.MissingPetPartnership.org)