

Aging Lifestyles: Design prevents feline from making beeline

by Joe_Volz

A fence for cats? You've got to be kidding. That was our reaction when we first read about the "cat containment" device that Web sites offer for sale.

Then, we got to thinking. At our ages, like many older Americans, we can't run as fast as we used to. Our cat Rico, though, dashes like a streak of lightning when he's frightened, particularly when he hears a grandchild charging after him.

Well, we realized that we were just the kind of people that marketer, Vern Munushian, 60, of Frederick, Md., had in mind when he made his cat containment system available earlier in the year at www.catpalaceusa.com.

The cat containment system is one of his most unique products, Munushian boasts. It uses a small receiver and aboveground wiring. The receivers are no bigger than two nickels and weigh an ounce. The microchip receivers, once installed on cats' collars, don't cause discomfort and the pets soon forget that they are wearing the devices - unless they try to escape.

The main base of the product, the transmitter, goes inside homes and sends signals to receivers placed under an inch or two - at most - of grass or aboveground to a fence or a post, maybe even a tree. Only one transmitter is needed, even when several cats are involved. Each cat must wear its own receiver on a collar included with the system. Fancy rhinestone collars are available for an extra charge.

The radio signal effectively keeps cats from leaving the yard. Similar systems are used to contain dogs within their yards. We saw a dog fence in action for the first time at a sister's home in Mequon, Wis. The family pet, a Labrador retriever, was racing across his yard to greet us when, all of a sudden, he stopped short, giving a yelp. No fence was in sight.

No, it wasn't cruelty to animals. Evie Bird Haas explained her dog's collar contained a receiver that beeped whenever he was close to wiring strung around the perimeter of the yard and hidden beneath grass. Because he had ignored the beeping he received a mild electrical charge, enough to stop him cold in his tracks but didn't hurt him.

Of course, cats and dogs have to be trained to realize something unpleasant will happen if they don't obey the beeping. But it takes no time at all for average pets to learn that a similar mild electrical charge will startle them every time they try to exit the yard. A few days' practice usually does the trick.

Pets must weigh 5 pounds or more to use the cat containment fence. The receivers have a safety feature that turns the beeping off in 20 seconds even if the animal ignores the signal.

Munushian noted that if people have several cats, the same battery-operated system can be used as long as each pet is wearing a receiver-collar.

The cat containment systems aren't cheap, though. To protect up to one third of an acre, pet lovers pay \$260 for a system with a single receiver and transmitter, 500 feet of wiring and an instruction booklet.

Now, did we buy one? No. Our cats are trained to wait for us to attach them to long leashes in the backyard that effectively keep them safe. Naturally, they almost immediately wind their leashes around any obstacle in their way - bushes, chairs, stepping stones, a large rock. The leashes' cost? Maybe \$15 to \$20 or so.

Now, if we could just train them to accompany us on our walks ...

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