

How to Live With Cats in Your Neighborhood



5 easy steps for detering cat behaviors

- 1** Talk to your neighbors. Determine whether the cat is a pet, stray, or feral, and if he has been neutered. If not, get it done!
- 2** Apply nontoxic deterrents around your yard.
- 3** Put a tight lid on your trash can.
- 4** Block gaps in the foundation of all sheds and outbuildings.
- 5** Use a car cover.



What is a feral cat?

Feral cats are members of the domestic cat species, but are not socialized to humans and are therefore not adoptable. Cats have been living outdoors near humans for more than 10,000 years. They typically live in groups called colonies and have strong social bonds with their colony members.

So, you're seeing cats in your yard...

Like all animals, feral cats make their home where they find shelter and food, often in close proximity to humans. We understand that not everyone enjoys having cats in their yards, and these simple tips will help you divert outdoor cats away from certain areas. You may also want the cats to stick around; some ideas below will help make areas attractive to the cats. Coupled with Trap-Neuter-Return and ongoing care, these quick steps can help you coexist with your neighborhood cats!

Because feral cats are not socialized and not adoptable, they do not belong in animal pounds or shelters, where they will likely be killed. Instead, feral cats should be neutered, vaccinated, and returned to their territory.

Trap-Neuter-Return

Trap-Neuter-Return is an effective and humane way to stabilize feral cat populations. Cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinarian, where they are neutered and vaccinated. Kittens and socialized cats (cats who are friendly to humans) are placed into loving homes. Healthy, adult feral cats (cats who are fearful of human contact) are returned to their colony site, where they are often provided continuing care by volunteers.

Trap-Neuter-Return works. No more kittens. Their lives are improved, and the population stabilizes and declines over time. The behaviors and stresses associated with mating, such as yowling and fighting, stop.

The Vacuum Effect

Animal control's traditional approach to feral cats—catch and kill—won't keep an area free of cats for long. Catch and kill is cruel, inhumane, and creates a vacuum, as do attempts to "relocate" cats. Known as the vacuum effect, this is a documented phenomenon in a variety of animal species throughout the world. Once the cats are removed from a territory, other cats move in to take advantage of the newly available resources and breed, forming a new colony. Catch and kill is an endless and costly cycle.



Easy Solutions to Cat Behaviors

Cats are getting into my trash.

Explanation: Cats are scavengers and are looking for food.

Quick Solutions:

- **Place a tight lid on your trash can.** Exposed trash bags will attract wildlife as well.
- **See if neighbors are feeding the cats.** If they are, make sure they are doing it on a regular schedule.
- **Start feeding the cats yourself if you find no regular feeder**—at a set time, during daylight hours, in an out-of-the-way place. Feeding cats regularly and in reasonable quantities, which can be consumed in less than 30 minutes or so, will help ensure they don't get so hungry they turn to the trash.

There are cat paw prints and/or scratches on my car.

Explanation: Cats like to perch on high ground.

Quick Solutions:

- **Gradually move cats' shelters and feeding stations away** to discourage cats from climbing on cars or other private property.
- **Purchase an appropriate cover** for the car or other vehicle.

Cats are digging in my garden.

Explanation: It is a cat's natural instinct to dig and deposit in soft or loose soil, moss, mulch, or sand.

Quick Solutions:

- **Scatter fresh orange and lemon peels or spray with citrus-scented fragrances.** Coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, or oil of lavender, lemongrass, citronella, or eucalyptus also deter cats.
- **Plant the herb rue** to repel cats, or sprinkle dried rue over the garden.
- **Use plastic carpet runners** spike-side up, covered lightly in soil. They can be found at local hardware or office supply stores. Or, set chicken wire firmly into the dirt with sharp edges rolled under.
- **Artfully arrange branches in a lattice-type pattern or wooden or plastic lattice fencing material over soil.** You can disguise these by planting flowers and seeds in the openings. You can also try embedding wooden chopsticks, pinecones, or sticks with dull points deep into the soil with the tops exposed eight inches apart.



- **Obtain Cat Scat™**, a nonchemical cat and wildlife repellent consisting of plastic mats that are cut into smaller pieces and pressed into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes that are harmless to cats and other animals, but discourage digging. Available at www.gardeners.com.

• **Cover exposed ground in flower beds** with large, attractive river rocks to prevent cats from digging. (They have the added benefit of deterring weeds.)

- **Establish a litter box** by tilling the soil or placing sand in an out-of-the-way spot in your yard. Keep it clean and free of deposits.
- **Use an aromatic spray product**, such as Dog and Cat Repellent, available at www.gardeners.com.



Cats are lounging in my yard or on my porch.

Explanation: Cats are territorial and will remain close to their food source.

Quick Solutions:

- **Apply cat repellent** liberally around the edges of the yard, the tops of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants. Available at pet supply stores and at www.gardeners.com.
- **Install an ultrasonic animal repellent** or a motion-activated water sprinkler, such as the ScareCrow™ or CatStop™ (Contech). Available at www.scatmat.com.



Cats are sleeping under my porch or in my shed.

Explanation: The cats are looking for a dry, warm shelter away from the elements.

Quick Solutions:

- **Physically block or seal the location the cats are entering with chicken wire or lattice** once you are certain the cats are not inside. Be sure to search for kittens before confirming that the cats have left—especially during spring, prime kitten season.
- **Provide a shelter** (similar to a small doghouse). Or, if they are feral and part of a nearby managed colony, ask the caregiver to provide a shelter for the cats. Shelters should be hidden to keep the cats safe, and placing them well can help guide the cats away from unwanted areas.

Feeding the cats attracts insects and wildlife.

Explanation: Cats need to be fed under proper guidelines. Leaving food out can attract animals.

Quick Solutions:

- **Keep the feeding area neat** and free of leftover food and trash.
- **Feed cats at the same designated time each day**, during daylight hours. They should be given only enough food for them to finish in one sitting, and all remaining food should be removed after 30 minutes. If another person is feeding, ask them to follow these guidelines too. For a more thorough list of colony management guidelines, visit www.alleycat.org/ColonyCare.

Cats are yowling, fighting, spraying, roaming, and having more kittens.

Explanation: These are all mating behaviors displayed by cats that have not been spayed and neutered, and they will breed prolifically.

Quick Solutions:

- **Spaying or neutering and vaccinating the cats will reduce the sex-drive hormones causing these behaviors.** Male cats will stop competing and fighting, spraying, and roaming. Females will stop yowling and producing kittens. After sterilization, hormones leave their system within three weeks and the behaviors usually stop entirely.
- **To combat the urine smell, spray the area** thoroughly with white vinegar or with products that use natural enzymes to combat the smell, such as Nature's Miracle® or Simple Solution®, available at pet supply stores.
- **You can find local resources and help at our website:** www.alleycat.org. To have a list of local feral cat help—Feral Friends—in your area emailed to you, visit www.alleycat.org/Response.

