

GOT OUTDOOR CATS? HOW TO ENSURE NEIGHBORHOOD HARMONY

By Becky Robinson

So, you're seeing cats in your backyard. Chances are you're not alone. Stray and feral cats are found in nearly every community.

Both strays and ferals live outdoors, where they can find food and shelter. Stray cats are usually lost or abandoned house pets — cats who are friendly with humans and can often be re-adopted. Feral cats, on the other hand, are not socialized to people and instead live with other cats in groups called “colonies.”

Feral cats are accustomed to life in the great outdoors and actually prefer it that way.

Sometimes these outdoor felines behave in ways their human neighbors don't like or understand. Not everyone likes having cats and other animals in their yards, but the fact is, the animals are there and it is their home, too. Still, there are simple, inexpensive ways to ensure a peaceful co-existence on the cul-de-sac.

Cats are hanging out on my porch and in my yard.

Try liberally sprinkling cat repellents such as a non-toxic powder, spray, or fresh citrus peels, around the edge of the yard, the tops of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants.

An ultrasonic repeller or a motion-activated water sprinkler will work, too.

Cats are digging in my petunias.

Cats have a natural instinct to dig in soft or loose soil or sand and bury their waste. Scatter cat repellents including fresh citrus peels, coffee grounds or pipe tobacco.

Another great deterrent is a product called Cat Scat™, a plastic mat that you cut into smaller pieces and press into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes that are harmless to cats and other animals, but discourage digging. Find Cat Scat™ online.

Cats are rummaging through my trash.

They are looking for food. Make sure you have a tightly fitting lid on your trash can.

Be aware that scavenging cats may not have a regular source of good food. If neighbors are feeding, ask if they are doing it on a regular schedule. Feeding outdoor cats regularly will keep them from scavenging.

Are you feeding outdoor cats?

Establish a regular daylight feeding time. The cats will adjust quickly. Put out only enough food for one meal and remove leftovers after about 30 minutes. Leftover food, like unsecured trash, attracts insects and wildlife.

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

The cats need to be spayed or neutered. All these behaviors will virtually cease soon after the cats have been altered — and there will be no more kittens. See www.alleycat.org for more information about Trap-Neuter-Return, a proven and humane option that ends the breeding cycle and stabilizes the population of outdoor cats.

For information about how you can help protect the cats in your community and nationwide, please visit www.alleycat.org. Alley Cat Allies provides free information and videos about the care and protection of feral and stray cats.