



Community Benefits of Feral Cats

Animals are good for us. Most who have contact with them would agree, whether the contact comes from a pet, a friend's pet, or a colony of feral cats in an alley. Having a managed feral cat colony in your neighborhood can benefit the entire community. The colony can demonstrate to all that compassion for cats teaches non-violence and tolerance for others.

Depending on the size of the colony, you may need to address some concerns from one or more of your neighbors. By addressing the specific concerns and showing that you want what is best for the cats and the neighbors, you may be able to diffuse many conflicts.

Talk to your neighbors

The most common complaints about cats include the soiling of lawns or gardens, yowling (especially late at night), left-over food scraps attracting wildlife, sickly animals, dirty, unattractive feeding areas and simply having free-roaming cats around.

A feral cat caretaker can alleviate many of these problems and concerns. First and foremost, it is critical that you open a friendly dialogue with neighbors. Appear reasonable and professional, rather than emotional and angry, even if your neighbors are not. This will give them confidence that you know what you are doing and that you care about their concerns.

First, let them know that you did not create this situation. Explain that the feral cats are there because someone else failed to sterilize their pet cats, abandoned them, or allowed them to become lost.

Explain the benefits of trap-neuter-return (TNR), the ineffectiveness of eradication, and the futility of withholding food. Describe your progress and let them know how many fewer cats there are (or will be) due to your efforts. Make them realize that you are doing them a favor by caring for the cats and preventing the birth of more.

You may also want to show Alley Cat Allies' video, Trap, Neuter, and Return: A Humane Approach to Feral Cat Control, at a community meeting or gathering of concerned neighbors. They may be more comfortable with the cats when they learn that groups around the world are setting up TNR programs for feral cats.

- Steps to prevent problems with neighbors:
- All cats should be spayed and neutered to prevent the noisy and objectionable breeding behavior neighbors dislike: yowling, spraying, fighting, and excessive roaming.
- Clean areas where urine has been sprayed. White vinegar or Nature's Miracle can eliminate any odors or staining. Cats will continue to spray in an area that smells of urine, so check and reclean the site if needed. Avoid using ammonia products; they smell so similar to cat urine that they may encourage future spraying.
- Make sure cats are vaccinated against rabies to alleviate health concerns. Immediately retrap and vet any cats that become ill or injured. Maintain good vet records, including a rabies tag number for each vaccinated cat. This will allow you to show actual evidence that the feral cats are healthy. Be sure your cats are eartipped so neighbors can easily identify cared-for, sterilized, and vaccinated cats.
- To prevent cats from soiling neighbors' yards and gardens, dump sand in an out of the way area or keep litter boxes at the colony site. Cats much prefer to use the sand and will do most of their eliminating there. Scoop daily to keep sand or boxes clean and to prevent odor. Scoop more often in hot weather. Pouring a layer of baking soda beneath the clean sand or

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litter can be helpful in preventing odors. Cats will stop using the litter or sand if the odor becomes too strong. Odor can also be a reason for neighbors to complain.

- Keep food area clean. Pick up trash regularly and remove empty food bowls, old dried up food, dirty bedding materials, etc. Make the area as attractive and clean looking as possible.
- If the area where the cats are fed is a particularly objectionable one for neighbors, gradually move the feeding station to a less objectionable area a few yards away. This can be done in increments and completed in one to two weeks. The cats will follow their food.
- Create a small, partially enclosed feeding site to make food and water bowls, as well as cats, less visible.
- If food is attracting wildlife, feed only in the morning or daylight hours when raccoons and other wildlife are not active. Cats will quickly adjust to the new schedule. Again, be sure to remove leftover food after feeding.
- Be sure the shelters you have erected look clean and are unobtrusive. Many caretakers have built creative shelters and feeding stations. These structures can be painted in natural colors, like dark green and brown, to blend in with surrounding foliage.
- If fleas are a concern, treat feral cats for fleas with a safe flea product like Advantage when you trap them. Only a few drops need to be applied to the back of the cat's neck; your veterinarian can do this for you. Be sure to change the bedding material or hay in shelters regularly. Some herbal products will deter fleas. Try sprinkling mint, dried pyrethra flowers, or a non-toxic herbal flea powder beneath the bedding. Mixing a small amount of fresh garlic into the cats' wet food can keep fleas to a minimum during warm weather.

Cats and gardens

- Here are some helpful suggestions for neighbors who wish to keep the cats out of their yards and gardens:
- Push wooden chopsticks or 10-inch plant stakes into flowerbeds every eight inches to discourage digging and scratching;
- Cats dislike citrus smells. Scatter orange and lemon peels, or spray with citrus-scented spray. You can also scatter citrus-scented pet bedding such as Citrafresh;
- Cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, and pipe tobacco also work to repel cats. Some individuals have also suggested lavender oil, lemon grass oil, citronella oil, eucalyptus oil, and mustard oil;
- Spray cat repellent (available at pet supply stores) around the edges of the yard, the top of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants. For information call your local animal supply store or PetsMart Corporate Office at 602-580-6100, or visit them on-line at www.petsmart.com;
- Cover exposed ground in flowerbeds with large attractive river rocks, to prevent cats from digging (they have the added benefit of deterring weeds);
- Plant the herb rue to repel cats, or sprinkle the dried herb over the garden.
- Try an ultrasonic animal repellent. These are available in lawn and garden stores or from Real Goods Catalog at 1-800-762-7325;
- Use a motion-activated sprinkler. Any cat coming into the yard will be sprayed but unharmed, and it is good for the lawn. If you are unable to find one, telephone Contech at 1-800-767-8658 to find out how to order one;
- A garden repellent called Reppers, manufactured in Holland by Beaphar, is available at, PetsMart, pets.com, Foster & Smith, or your local pet store. Reppers retails for \$19.95. Tried

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and proven by ACA staff and neighbors;

- And, a non-chemical cat and wildlife repellent called CatScat is made of plastic mats that are pressed into the soil. Each mat, complete with flexible plastic spikes, is cut into four pieces. The spikes are harmless to cats and other animals, but are effective in discouraging excavation. They are sold in packages of 5 for \$12.95 from Gardener's Supply Company, at www.gardeners.com or 1-800- 863-1700. Gardener's Supply Company reports that many people consistently reorder this product.

The San Francisco SPCA provided many of these tips.

If it is possible, you may want to offer to help your neighbors with any of the above, whether purchasing supplies for them or setting up the deterrents. They will appreciate the offer and your willingness to help even if they don't accept it.

Other problems:

If neighbors express concern about the effects of feral cats on local wildlife, give them copies of Alley Cat Allies' materials on feral cats and predation. Also, some neighbors may fear that feral cats will pose a threat to their children. Explain to them that feral cats are naturally wary of people and will not approach humans they do not know. Feral cats would not attack anyone unless they were cornered. Advise them to teach their children to not touch unknown animals. Children should ask an adult for help if they think an animal may be trapped, sick, or injured, or if they find a baby animal.

Feral cats do not pose a disease risk to humans, but some neighbors may need to be reassured. Give them copies of Alley Cat Allies' factsheet, [Health Care for Feral Cats and Zoonoses: Potential Health Hazards for Humans](#). Also advise them that they can avoid any risk by not touching the cats and by washing their hands after gardening.

Sometimes, even after having expended your best efforts, neighbors may continue to complain, or even be hostile towards you and the cats. This can be very frustrating. In these difficult situations it may be beneficial to contact IndyFeral to help solve the problem in a way that is satisfactory to all concerned.

Remember: It is vital that you maintain detailed, up-to-date health records on all of your feral cats. Also eartip them to identify them as sterilized, vaccinated, and cared-for ferals. To keep track of the your colony's health record, request a tracking sheet from IndyFeral. Proving that the cats have been vaccinated can save their lives if animal control becomes involved.

If any complaints are made to you or to animal control, it is important to act quickly and demonstrate that you are willing to cooperate with neighbors. Even if there have been no complaints, you may want to avoid any conflicts by minimizing the impact of the feral cat colony on the neighborhood.

If any of the above seems complicated or time-consuming at first glance, remember that you are fighting for the lives of feral cats and building good public relations for the future. In addition, you might be strengthening your community by getting more people involved! Any feral cat problems that are solved positively and amicably help to leave a better impression overall about feral cats and caretakers and will serve to make it easier for all of us to continue to care for our ferals.

