

Free-roaming and feral cats (or community cats, as we like to call them) live in our communities and make their homes wherever they can find food and shelter. When neighborhood disputes escalate, both the caregiver and the complainant become angry and refuse to listen. It's important to talk to one another in person, listen closely to all sides of the argument and then find solutions that work best for everyone. There are ways to protect both the cats' lives and people's personal property without resorting to killing the cats or taking legal measures. The solutions don't happen overnight, though, so each party needs to be patient, compromise and work toward the end goal of reducing the number of cats.

Let's look at both sides of the issue:

Cat caregiver: Most of the time, the cat caregiver did not create the community cat problem. Compassion is what prompts caregivers to feed community cats. These cats' lives are valued by the caregiver. But many caregivers do not realize that there are resources out there to help them care for the cats and resolve any cat-related issues.

Complainant: People who complain about community cats legitimately feel that the cats are a nuisance because they eliminate in their gardens, yowl at night and spray smelly urine. Complainants often are unaware that removing the cats will not solve the problem. They are also unaware of the humane deterrents available to help keep community cats off their property.

The value of TNR

Whether you love or loathe community cats, trap-neuter-return (TNR) is the most effective and humane way to effectively reduce the number of community cats and also reduce nuisance behaviors. In a TNR program, cats are humanely trapped, spayed or neutered, vaccinated and then returned to their communities to live out their lives. Because they have been fixed and can no longer breed, the number of cats is reduced over time.

Being spayed or neutered also stops nuisance behaviors. Male cats are no longer competing or fighting with each other, spraying urine or roaming blocks away from their neighborhood. Females no longer yowl to seek a mate and no longer have kittens, of course. These behaviors are typically reduced immediately and eliminated completely only a month after the surgery. Additionally, TNR provides vaccines, so the cats are healthier and do not pose a threat to public health.

Humane deterrents

ScareCrow: This motion-activated sprinkler has an infrared sensor that releases a three-second blast of water. The sprinkler "fires" 1,000 times on one nine-volt battery and covers an area 45 by 35 feet long. It's available at contech-inc.com.

CatStop: This motion-activated, ultrasonic alarm emits a high-pitched sound that repels cats, but can't be heard by humans. A nine-volt battery can operate up to nine months, depending on usage. It's available at contech-inc.com.

CatScat: These harmless mats or carpet runners are made of flexible plastic spikes. Place on the ground with spike side up to discourage cats from digging.

Other digging deterrents: Push chopsticks into small potted plants. Use pine cones, lava rocks, concrete pavers or stones as mulch to prevent cats from digging. Place large river rocks throughout the garden or use poultry fencing or landscape wrap around plants.

Smells that repel cats: To keep cats out of yards or gardens, plant the herb rue or sprinkle dried rue. Citrus or lemon scents, garlic, ammonia, vinegar, coffee grinds, pipe tobacco, mustard, citronella or eucalyptus all deter cats as well. The scents diminish over time, so re-applying is necessary.

Neutralizing urine smell: OdoBan, Nature's Miracle, Fizzion and Simple Solution are effective natural enzyme products that are available at pet supply stores or online.

Blocking off access: Cats seek out dry, warm shelter away from the elements. Block off access to the places where you don't want cats (making sure no cats are inside before doing so). To guide cats away from those areas, provide another shelter. There are many inexpensive options for community cat shelters.

You can watch a video about cat deterrents at [bestfriends.org/deter](https://www.bestfriends.org/deter).

Additional tips for caregivers

Here's how you can help community cats be good neighbors.

- Keep the feeding station neat and tidy. Remove all trash and leftover food promptly.
- Feed the cats at a regular place and time during daylight hours and only feed enough to last one feeding. This practice will not only help the cats get on a schedule, but it also will eliminate attraction of other wildlife.
- Establish a litter box. Creating a sandy area that you clean regularly will help keep the cats from eliminating in areas where you don't want them to eliminate.
- Plant a bed of catnip in an area where you don't mind the cats hanging out. They'll be drawn to the catnip instead of the flowerbeds.
- Provide a shelter so the cats are not nesting in places where they are not wanted. There are many feral cat shelter options available online.
- Know your local laws and ordinances. Protect yourself and the cats by knowing your legal rights.
- Educate your neighbors and keep an ongoing dialog with them. Make sure the deterrents or solutions are implemented and are working for them.
- Keep accurate records on how many cats you care for and when they were spayed or neutered.