

Common Concerns and Solutions Regarding Community Cats

(Adapted from Oakland Animal Services, Oakland, CA <http://www.oaklandanimalservices.org/>, 2009)

Common Concerns:

• Cats are lounging in my yard or on my porch.

Explanation: Cats are territorial and will remain close to their food source. Ensuring that cats are neutered will dramatically reduce their tendency to roam and keep them from unwanted areas.

Quick Solutions:

- Apply cat repellent liberally around the edges of the yard, the tops of fences, and on any favorite digging areas or plants. Liquid Fence is very effective and 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 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 and pipe tobacco also deter cats.
- Plant the herb rue to repel cats or sprinkle dried rue over the garden.
- Obtain Cat Scat™, a nonchemical cat and wildlife repellent consisting of plastic mats 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. Available at www.gardeners.com.
- Plastic carpet runners, which can be found at local hardware or office supply stores, can also be used when placed spike-side up and covered lightly in soil. Or, set chicken wire firmly into the dirt with sharp edges rolled under.
- Place some of the following over soil: Branches in a lattice-type pattern, or wooden or plastic lattice fencing material artfully arranged. You can disguise these by planting flowers and seeds in the openings. Try embedding wooden chopsticks, pinecones, or sticks with dull points deep into the soil with the tops exposed eight inches apart.
- Cover exposed ground in flower beds with large attractive river rocks to prevent cats from digging. (They have the added benefit of deterring weeds.)
- Place marble chips in flower beds to stop cats from digging.
- You can stop cats from using certain areas of the yard as a litter box by working crushed moth balls into the top inch of soil.

• Cats are sleeping under my porch or in my shed.

Explanation: The cats are looking for 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 kitten seasons.
- Provide a shelter (similar to a small doghouse). Or, if they're 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.

- **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 other wildlife as well.
- See if neighbors are feeding the cats. If they are, make sure they are doing it on a regular schedule. If you find no regular feeder, start feeding the cats yourself– 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 under 20 minutes, will help ensure they don't get so hungry that they go through the trash.

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

Explanation: Cats like to perch on high ground.

Quick Solutions:

- Discourage cats from climbing on cars or other private property by gradually moving their shelters and feeding stations away from such areas into more secluded places.
- Purchase an appropriate cover for the car or other vehicle.

- **I smell cat urine.**

Explanation: Tomcats spray to mark their territory as part of their mating behaviors.

Quick Solutions:

- Spray the area thoroughly with white vinegar or with nontoxic products available at pet supply stores.
- The permanent solution is to ensure that the cats are neutered. It will reduce their urge to mark territory and make their urine less pungent.

- **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.

- **Feeding the cats attracts insects and wildlife.**

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

Quick Solutions:

- Keeping the feeding area neat and free of leftover food and trash is of utmost importance.
- Cats should be feed only at a designated time, during daylight hours. They should be given only enough food for them to finish in one sitting. All remaining food should be removed.
- If another person is feeding, ask them to follow these guidelines too.