

COMMUNITY COLONY CARE

So, you want to make sure that feral cats, also known as community cats, stick to a specific area. There are lots of reasons it's beneficial to do this! Maybe you're the cats' caregiver and want to keep them close by. Maybe you want to ensure the cats stay out of where they aren't welcome, like a concerned neighbor's yard.

To make it happen, you'll have to think like a cat. By creating a welcoming space tailored to the needs and instincts of these independent kitties, you'll create an environment that's rewarding for both cats and people.

Food Tips

Feeding your cats year-round at a regular time (preferably daylight), will keep them healthy and strong. Here are some things to keep in mind when you're feeding the kitties:

- Adult cats eat about 5.5 ounces of wet food and 2 ounces of dry food per day (half a cup if only dry). Cats' needs vary though, so adjust to how much you see them actually eating in a reasonable period of time.
- If the cats eat all the food in 15 minutes or less, they may need more. If there's always food left after 30 minutes, you might be giving them too much.
- Cats love canned wet food, but dry food is just as nutritious.
- Don't leave uneaten food out for more than 30 minutes—it attracts bugs.
- Keep the feeding area clean and in one maintained location—it's better for the cats' health and the community.

Don't worry if some cats eat before others. Felines with seniority in the cat community may eat before others who are lower on the social scale. You shouldn't try to manage this interaction. It's a cat thing.

Water Tips

Cats need clean water every day, in all conditions. During the winter, there are tons of ways to keep water from freezing, like using heated water bowls and shielding the bowls from wind.

In the summertime, water is extremely important, so make sure the cats have ample sources.

Shelter Tips

A dedicated outdoor shelter gives cats that live outside a place to avoid bad weather, will help keep them close to home, and deter them from exploring neighbors' yards or areas they're not welcome, like underneath a porch. A good size shelter should be 2 feet by 3 feet and at least 18 inches high. Larger isn't always better, because the heat will disperse quickly, and the cats will need a warm shelter during the winter. A space large enough for three to five cats to huddle is perfect.

- Maintenance: Check the shelters regularly to make sure they're in good condition.

- Doorway: The doorway should only be big enough for cats—about 6-8 inches wide to help keep out other animals. Face the entry away from the wind, or use a door flap or L-shaped entry to keep out the elements.
- Protection from the elements: Make the shelter waterproof, windproof, and elevated off the ground. Wood pallets are great for elevation.
- Bedding: Straw makes the best insulation and bedding, because it resists moisture and keeps the shelter warm. Never use hay—it retains moisture and will make the shelter wet and cold and avoid blankets and towels for the same reason.
- Camouflage: Paint the shelter a dark color or cover it with leaves or brush so it blends in with the environment. Placing the shelter in a wooded area away from buildings and traffic is safer for the cats (and the neighbors will appreciate it).

And don't be discouraged if the cats don't immediately take to the shelters that you've made for them! The cats simply may not have noticed the shelters, or are still investigating these new objects you've placed in their territory. If the cats aren't using the shelter after a few weeks, try moving it closer to an area where the cats already prefer to hang out, but still gives the cats privacy from the public. (A little catnip can go a long way to encourage them to try out the shelter, too!) And don't be afraid of a little trial and error when it comes to shelter placement and making simple modifications – you may need to add or remove a door flap or bedding to find out what the kitties like best. The important thing is that the little house you've made for them will be there when the cats are ready to use it.

Fleas

Your veterinarian can apply a long-lasting, topical flea-control product like Advantage when the cats are under anesthesia for their neuter surgery. Oral medications like CAPSTAR can be added to canned food, but be careful because monitoring the dosage is a challenge for cats that share food or have communal bowls. This method works best for a small colony or cats that are used to eating individually.

Change the shelter bedding at least twice a year, and when you do, you can spray the floor with a cat-safe flea-control product. You can also sprinkle food-grade diatomaceous earth, mint, or dried pyrethrum flowers under the bedding to deter fleas.

Fleas are a natural part of life outdoors, so you can do your best to prevent them by treating the environment, but don't worry about it too much.

Deworming

Cats get worms by swallowing fleas during grooming, and can be treated when they're taken in for neutering. They'll look like little pieces of rice in the cats' stool. If you find a neutered colony with worms, it's not that big a deal!

Tapeworms are common and won't harm an otherwise healthy cat. A complete dewormer, such as Drontal Plus, which includes pyrantel pamoate, praziquantel and febantel, comes in pill form. When using this dewormer you'll need to monitor the cats closely as they eat and

feed them on individual paper plates to make sure each kitty is getting the proper dosage. You can also buy dewormer cat treats.

The other type of worm that may be visible in cats' stool are roundworms. These will look more like small spaghetti noodles. Pyrantel pamoate is most commonly used to treat roundworms—it comes in a liquid form and can be mixed into wet food. It won't treat tapeworms but using a complete dewormer, such as Drontal Plus, can help with these types of worms, too.

Centragard is a product that came on the market in 2018. It's a transdermal or topical medication, which means it's absorbed through the skin, just like flea and tick medication. It's another complete dewormer and prevents roundworms, tapeworms, hookworms, and heartworms

Ongoing Health Care

We know that you want to give the best care possible for your outdoor cats through Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), and supplying food and shelter. To make sure the cats you care for are living the happiest, healthiest lives possible, you should also provide ongoing health care. This means carefully keeping track of the cats in your colony, their health, who still needs to be neutered, and keeping an eye out for new cats that may join who need to be trapped and neutered.

When keeping an eye on the health of outdoor cats, look for any kitties who may look a little beat up or rough around the edges. This includes changes in behavior, eating habits, dull eyes or coats, discharge from noses or eyes, weight loss, fur loss, changes in their gait, and listlessness.

Make sure to talk to your veterinarian (who has experience with community cats) for how to handle any health issues that might come up. If a problem does occur, talk to your veterinarian first and describe the symptoms, and then the two of you can decide if the cat needs to be trapped and examined.

There are also preventative measures you can take to keep the cats safe, like asking your veterinarian for deworming medicine and antibiotics so you can easily care for minor health issues that may come up. And it's always useful to have a financial plan in place in case something arises.

Winter Weather Tips

Community cats, also called outdoor, stray or feral cats, are well-suited to living outdoors—usually in close proximity to humans—and can survive winter on their own. They are resilient and able to live and thrive in all varieties of locations, weather conditions, and climates. However, there are still things you can do to help make life outdoors more comfortable.

Food and Water

Cats can benefit from extra food during winter, so increase food portions to help them conserve energy. Also make sure to set out fresh water twice a day.

- Wet food takes less energy to digest, but should be served in plastic containers to prevent freezing. Providing dry food, which will not freeze, works for frigid temperatures, too.
- Warm up canned food and water before serving or use heated electric bowls.
- Use bowls that are deep rather than wide and place them in sunny areas to keep water from freezing. Avoid using metal bowls.
- Spray insulation foam into the underside of plastic feeding dishes and water bowls to help prevent food and water from freezing as quickly.
- Build a feeding station as this is the best way to feed feral cats during the cold months. It will shield food, water, and the cats from the elements. An insulated feeding station that is built in the same fashion as a cat shelter works even better.
- Put a microwavable heating pad, like a Snuggle Safe, under the bowls. You can even make your own homemade heating pad by filling fabric pouches with rice, and heating it in the microwave.
- If there's a water source like a spigot, run the water slightly—it won't freeze as fast as still water. You can also use a water fountain or water bowl with a fountain feature.

Winter Safety Tips

- Stray cats in winter gravitate to warm places. Before starting your car, give the hood of your car a few taps to make sure that a cat has not hidden underneath the car or inside the engine for warmth. Also, always check between your tires and wheel wells.
- Do not use antifreeze, which is toxic and deadly, in an area accessible to cats. Keep it out of reach and clean up spills! Most antifreeze brands use ethylene glycol as the main ingredient, so be sure to switch to a brand made with propylene glycol because it is less toxic, though still harmful.
- Refrain from using salt or chemicals to melt snow. These can be lethal when licked off paws or ingested from melting puddles. They also hurt cats' paw pads. Alternatively, pet friendly deicers are available at most pet stores.
- Spaying and neutering improves cats' overall health, and healthier cats are better equipped for the cold elements. However, if you're conducting Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) in the winter, check the traps frequently and provide a warm holding area, pre-and-post surgery. If it's too cold for you, it's probably too cold for cats to be in traps, exposed to the elements, for extended periods of time

Summer Weather Tips

Rising temperatures means special considerations for cat care. Here are some tips to keep your feline friend well-fed and hydrated during warmer months.

Food and Water

- Don't leave food out for too long. After about 30 minutes, bugs will start to show up. Picking up uneaten food after roughly 45 minutes helps prevent that.
- Feed cats dry food in the summer—it attracts fewer insects. But if you give wet food, add water to keep it from drying out, or be sure to pick it up within 45 minutes

- Invest in an ant-proof bowl.
- You can create your own “ant barrier” by surrounding the bowl with baking soda or a line of food-grade diatomaceous earth without chemical additives.
- Extra water is essential in hot weather. Too much water is better than not enough.
- Place water bowls in shaded areas. Feeding stations keep water out of the sun, and they’re easy to build!
- Use a bowl that is narrow but deep. This reduces the bowl’s surface area and slows evaporation.
- Drop a few ice cubes into the water bowl (if the kitty doesn’t mind ice).
- Pet water fountains provide a constant stream of water, inspiring cats to drink even more.

Shelter

- Provide easy access to shaded places, like under a deck,
- Build an outdoor cat shelter on the cheap with supplies found at any hardware store.

Trapping Conditions

- If you perform Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) during the summer, take the extreme heat into account. Do not leave cats in traps—they can get heat stroke just like people. Once the cat is trapped, keep her in the shade with a trap cover or in an air-conditioned space.
- Never leave cats in a car while trapping.
- Don’t place traps on surfaces that get extremely hot from the sun, such as asphalt. The metal can absorb the heat and burn the cat’s paws.