

COMMUNITY CATS IN ST. JOHNS



Community cats, also called *feral* cats, are household cats, or their offspring, that have been turned loose outdoors and are not pets. Cats that are turned loose will become wild in order to survive. True feral cats have no history of nurturing human contact or socialization, and therefore, can become dangerous.

FERAL OR NOT?

EITHER WAY, STAY AWAY

It's sometimes difficult to tell the difference between a feral cat and a pet cat that is allowed to roam. Neither cat is 100% safe for human contact, so unless conducting TNR, keep your distance to be safe.

How can I help?

A FEW TIPS TO REMEMBER

1. Spay or neuter your pets in addition to getting their vaccinations.
2. Keep your pet cats safe by preventing them from roaming off of your property.
3. DO NOT drop off kittens at City Park or other open areas.
4. Close off areas under your deck, outbuildings, or storage to prevent cats from sleeping or nesting there.
5. Photograph and report any unattended pets to the City Offices 989-224-8944.
6. Avoid feeding the cats and thereby identifying your property as a haven for a new community cat colony.
7. DO NOT try to poison or kill suspected feral cats--see why below.

COMMUNITY CAT COMPLICATIONS

Some negative effects of these cats are:

- Impregnating pet cats
- Injuring pets or family members
- Spreading diseases such as rabies or distemper

IT'S TIME TO ACT

Take action by educating yourself and urging your neighbors to get educated about how to handle community cat concerns.

1. Talk with your neighbors to determine which cats are pets, strays, or feral.
2. Apply humane deterrents around your yard to discourage cats.
3. Put a tight lid on your trash cans and recycling.
4. Block gaps outdoors where cats might like to seek shelter.
5. Use a cover to keep pawprints off of your car, if desired.

WHY CAN'T I JUST DO AWAY WITH THEM?

First, those roaming cats may actually be someone's pet. In addition to being inhumane, "catch & kill" is a completely ineffective long-term solution because other cat colonies will move into your newly available territory and continue to breed. Often, these new colonies are even larger than the existing colony. This is known as the Vacuum Effect. The new cats will likely bring even more concerns than the cats who had established their colony previously.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

TRAP * NEUTER * RETURN

TNR is the only proven, effective and humane solution to reduce and manage community cat populations.

1. Contact Animal Control because the cat may actually be a roaming pet cat and have an owner who is searching for it.
2. The suspected feral cat is captured and brought to a vet.
3. The vet spays or neuters the cat, vaccinates it, and tips its ear, which designates it as a TNR animal.
4. The cat returns to its territory but can no longer reproduce or spread disease.
5. The population of community cats decreases.

The City's first and foremost effort to control feral cats is to provide public education. Further, the City does promote volunteer efforts to trap, neuter, and release feral cats.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF...

PROBLEM: Cats are digging in my garden.

EASY SOLUTIONS: Scatter fresh orange or lemon peels, spray with citrus fragrance, add coffee grounds, or add pipe tobacco as natural deterrents that will not hurt your garden. Plastic carpet runners, chicken wire, or lattice patterns are also deterrents. Adding rocks to your garden bed will also help.

PROBLEM: Cats are sleeping under my porch.

EASY SOLUTIONS: Block open areas with lattice or chicken wire after all cats have left the space. Provide a small shelter hidden away on your property.

PROBLEM: Cats are getting into my trash.

EASY SOLUTIONS: Place a tight lid on your trash can. Some suggest feeding community cats during the daylight hours in an out of the way place on your property because cats that are not hungry will not scavenge. We do not advise this if you aren't dealing with an established cat colony on your property.

PROBLEM: I smell cat urine.

EASY SOLUTIONS: Tom cats (unneutered, male cats) spray to mark their territory. Practice TNR--neutered cats have less urge to mark and TNR also results in less pungent urine.

PROBLEM: Feeding cats attracts insects and wildlife.

EASY SOLUTIONS: If you are feeding a feral cat colony, keep the feeding area clean and neat. Feed at a designated time during daylight hours, and only provide enough food for cats to finish in one sitting. Any remaining food should be removed before twilight.

PROBLEM: Cats are yowling, fighting, and having kittens.

EASY SOLUTIONS: These are mating behaviors. Cats that have not been neutered will mate prolifically. TNR will reduce the hormones causing this behavior, which will stop male cat competition and unwanted kittens. About 3 weeks after neutering, these mating behaviors stop entirely.

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Problems and solutions courtesy of First Coast No More Homeless Pets