



# Discouraging Free Roaming Cats

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*The first step with any behavioral issue is to take your cat to the veterinarian for a full evaluation. Cats are very stoic animals and will hide illness and injury. Sometimes our only clue that something is physically wrong is a behavioral symptom. Many behavioral modification programs can begin in conjunction with or shortly after your trip to the veterinarian.*

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Outdoor cats can be a nuisance for gardeners and bird watchers but they can also cause distress for your indoor cat. Your cat might vocalize and attempt to attack cats on the other side of the window or start urine marking the perimeter of your home near doors and windows in an attempt to feel secure. Outdoor cats, especially those not spayed or neutered, will spray, urinate and defecate around your home in an attempt to claim your yard as territory. These smells easily reach your cat inside and cause the distress.

Another problem that could occur is that your indoor cat becomes stressed in general smelling and seeing another cat outside. In a multi-cat home, if one cat becomes stressed enough, it may redirect its fear-aggression on to another cat, or even a family member, since it can't get to that outdoor cat. *See also the article on Cats in Conflict.* Your cats might even begin to house soil due to the stress. *See also the article on Reducing Urine Marking.*

If you notice your indoor cat having issues in only one area and there is a window in that room, consider blocking the cats sight with a window shade or opaque film.

Never use poisons or anything harmful; you just need to deter the cat. Poisons are inhumane and might kill innocent wildlife or someone's pet that may not even be causing the problem. Pet stores or garden supply stores have commercial repellants that are humane to use. Make sure these repellants won't harm any of your garden plants and are safe to use as an animal deterrent. Some of these will need to be replaced over time if you notice the problem re-occurring.

There are deterrents you can use, humanely, to discourage the outdoor cats from coming near your home. Some are motion-activated to blast out air, so they only turn on when an animal is near it. The key idea is to startle the cat so he leaves and hopefully doesn't return. During nice weather, turning your sprinkler system on in those areas will deter cats from walking through your yard. Dawn and dusk are the times of day most cats are active, so that would be the best time to have the sprinklers running. Using a timer or motion-activated sprinklers work well for times you may not be home.

If cats are digging in unwanted areas, decorative stones may work to deter the cat. The stones need to be placed so it makes it awkward for the cat to walk upon. Smooth, rounded stones are too easy to walk around and the cat might actually find them comfortable enough to use for a

resting area. Consider moving your bird feeders away from windows and attach a metal guard in the shape of an inverted cone to protect the platform.

You can also try balancing old pans or cookie sheets on top of a fence or in a garden area. For fence walking cats, consider adding water to the pan or in a bowl on top of the pan for an added level of deterrence. Double sided sticky tape or carpet runner turned nub side up can also be place across fences or decks. Cats do not like the sensations of these items on their paws and will avoid the area.

If the suggestions above do not work, the next step would be to attempt to find out who owns those cats. If you choose to approach the cat's guardian, remember to be polite, and that you want what is best for all involved. Emphasize that you are concerned as well for their cat's safety as an outdoor cat. Brainstorm with the owner about ways they can keep their cat in their yard. Maybe they could build an outdoor 'catio' or train their cat to walk on a harness. That way the cat gets to be outside but in a supervised setting.

Contact your local Animal Control if you cannot determine the cat's owner. It can be difficult to determine a shy/fearful cat from a truly feral cat. Do not feed outdoor cats, as it will only encourage them to hang around your home. If the cat is extremely friendly, please take it to your local Veterinarian, Animal Control or Animal Shelter ONLY to have it scanned for a microchip with the goal of contacting the owner.

If you decide to trap the cat to bring it to Animal Control or to your local Animal Shelter, please contact them first! Some Animal Shelters, such as Wayside Waifs are Managed Admissions Shelters, which means an appointment must be made in advance. They can provide information on how to correctly and humanely trap a cat.

***If after trying these suggestions you are still experiencing undesirable behaviors in your cat, SUBMIT QUESTIONS by clicking the link under Ask A Trainer on the Behavior and Training page of the Wayside Waifs website: [www.waysidewaifs.org](http://www.waysidewaifs.org)***

Written by the Wayside Waifs Animal Behavior Team

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