



Keeping Unwanted Animals Out of Your Yard: Cats

A common problem with feral cats is people don't want them in their yards. As a result, here are some products and techniques to help you keep feral or stray cats out of your yard.

1. Motion-activated sprinklers

Motion activated sprinklers use infra-red to detect when an animal enters a defined territory. When a cat enters the infra-red field, the sprinkler shoots out a burst of water for a few seconds in the general direction of the animal. The effect is to frighten the cats rather than soak them, but they quickly learn not to enter the area. After a while, the sprinkler becomes unnecessary. It doesn't work in winter conditions, as the water will freeze, but if you introduce the device in warmer weather, by wintertime you'll have trained them.

Resources: "Scarecrow," 1-800-767-8658 or www.contech-inc.com.
"Spray Away", manufactured by Havahart.

2. Ultrasonic devices

These devices contain a motion sensor and, upon being triggered, emit a high-frequency alarm imperceptible to humans but highly annoying and startling to cats. The key with ultrasonic devices is to make sure you have enough of them for the size of the area you're trying to exclude the cats from. "CatStop," reportedly monitors 280 square feet. Some creative uses for the device include: using two of them to guard a property line. One device is placed at each end of the property line and then positioned so that their motion sensors face each other. Whenever a cat crosses the line, one of the devices goes off. "CatStop" can also be mounted high up off the ground and positioned to "cover" a car parked below, keeping cats off the vehicle. It can be used in any weather, though the battery will likely need to be replaced more often in cold temperatures.

Resources: "Catstop," made by Contech.

3. Scent repellants

Both naturally-based and chemically-based scent repellants are available.

The chemical products contain the active ingredient methylonylketone, which the manufacturers warn should not be applied to food crops. Reports on the effectiveness of scent repellants are mixed, sometimes working quite well and in other situations, not at all. Repellants should be sprayed or placed around the edges of the yard, the top of fences and on any favorite digging areas or plants. Sprays need to be replenished after rain.

Naturally-based products include: The Coleus-Canina plant, a weed originating in Europe, is known as the "Scardy-Cat" or "Pee-off" plant because it emits an odor offensive to cats, but not to humans, and deters their presence. Recommendation is to plant them three feet apart around the area to be protected. You may need to order cuttings or seeds from a nursery or dealer.

Resources: list of brokers www.scardy-cat.com .

For protecting gardens or flower beds, common household items may be effective, including the herb rue, either planted or sprinkled in its dry form. Other suggestions for garden areas are orange and lemon peels (cats dislike citrus smells), cayenne pepper, coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, lavender oil, lemon grass oil, citronella oil, peppermint oil, eucalyptus oil, and mustard oil.

"Havahart's Cat Repellent" uses capsaicin pepper and oil of mustard as its active ingredients. It repels by both taste and odor, has a lemon scent, lasts 7-10 days and needs to be reapplied after rain or new growth.

Resource: "Cat Repellent" by Havahart. www.havahart.com

4. Physical barriers to digging

Gardens and flower beds can be protected from digging through a number of means: "Cat Scat" from Gardener's Supply consists of plastic mats that are pressed into the soil. Each mat has flexible plastic spikes and is cut into four pieces. The spikes are harmless to cats and other animals, but discourage excavation. Cover exposed ground with rough surfaced rocks. Take branches from a thorny plant, like a Rose of Sharon tree, and lay them on the ground in a lattice-type pattern, then plant flowers and seeds in the openings. Regular lattice type fencing used in this way will also discourage digging.

Resource: "Cat Scat" from Gardener's Supply

5. Make an Outdoor Litterbox

A sandbox will tend to be an attractive place for cats to do their thing. Take a very large Rubbermaid plastic container and fill it with regular "kiddie sand box" sand. If you can, put a couple of pieces of the cats' poop in it to attract them. The cats will enjoy digging in the fine sand and will shift to using it. Scoop occasionally and once a month or so, dump and replace the sand. If you want to be extra neat, use a large Rubbermaid storage container for the box, filling the bottom with several inches of sand. Then cut a door in one of the sides, above sand level and approximately 8 x 8 inches. Keep the container covered. To be even neater, take the Rubbermaid storage container, turn it upside down and cut a hole in the side. Place a normal litterbox with regular litter inside the container. Another method is to a pile of peat moss (4 feet square, 8 inches deep) in a corner of the yard, replaced once a month or so. It's very cheap, easy to handle and dispose of, keeps the smell down, and is far more attractive than the neighbor's garden.