

5 Ways You Can Help Feral Cats



October 16 marks the 15th annual National Feral Cat Day with the goal of bringing awareness to the sad plight of feral cats that are forced to live on the streets of cities and towns as well as in rural areas across America.

Feral cats are a “man-made problem” that results from people ruthlessly abandoning cats, leaving them to fend for themselves. And, if they have not been spayed or neutered, their numbers in a community quickly escalate.

The official definition of a feral is a cat that is living in a wild state after domestication. They are also often referred to as Community Cats. Fortunately, cats quickly revert to their natural instincts in order to survive. But this doesn't mean they do well on their own. It's tough to find food, water and shelter in order to survive, let alone thrive.

It's a slow process to educate people that cats (and dogs for that matter) can't fend for themselves. If you can't keep a pet, the most humane thing to do is to take it to a no-kill shelter rather than simply turn it out onto the streets.

Here are some useful tips on how to aid ferals living in your area.

1. TNT – Trap, Neuter and Return

If you find community cats in your neighborhood, the very best way to help them is to get them spayed and neutered. The process of having them spayed and neutered and

returned to the area where they were found is called TNT – Trap, Neuter and Return. Not only will it stop the population of cats from growing, but it also makes the cats healthier and happier because they are not forced to continue to bear litters of kittens. It stops nuisance behavior such as yowling, fighting, which will make neighbors more tolerant of them too.

The best way to humanely trap cats is to withhold food from them for 12-24 hours and then set the humane traps with tempting treats, such as tuna or wet food.

Once caught, cover the trap entirely with old sheets or towels, which will calm the cat. Once the cat has recovered from surgery, which may take a couple of days, they must be returned to the exact location where they were originally caught.

Just about every community has low-cost or free spay/neuter clinics to help, and they often offer free rental of trapping equipment. To find one near you, contact your local feline rescue group, Humane Society or ASPCA. You can also find local spay/neuter resources at www.neuterspay.org.

2. Establishing A Feeding Routine For Feral Cats

Be sure to provide the cats with fresh food and water every day. Since they don't have "owners," they rely on the kindness of people to help them survive. If possible, find other concerned cat people in your neighborhood and set up a feeding roster so that you can share the responsibilities.

3. Provide Shelter

This is particularly important if you live in a colder climate. You can make a very simple and inexpensive shelter using a plastic storage bin and straw, or you can build something more sturdy and insulated. [Here are several great plans](#) for easy-to-make shelters.

4. Rescue, Foster and Find Homes

Many feral cats are friendly and will come close to humans. Where possible, try and remove them from the colony. Very young kittens that are removed early will be easy to socialize in a foster care program too. Work in conjunction with a rescue group in your area. Their volunteers will be very willing to teach you the ropes.

5. Spread the Word

The feral cats that you're seeing in your neighborhood are the descendants of unfixed domestic cats. By encouraging your neighbors to spay/neuter their pets and educating them about low-cost or free options, they will help prevent the introduction of more homeless cats in your neighborhood.