

KEEPING CATS OUT OF GARDENS & YARDS

A common source of complaints about feral cats is people who don't want them in their yards or gardens or on other parts of their property. Trying to work with property owners to alleviate this problem is a better way to protect the cats than arguing the felines have a right to go wherever they want. Listed below are several products and methods for keeping the cats away from places they're not welcomed. There are deterrents, which act to discourage cats from entering or remaining in a space, and confinement systems which restrict their movement to certain areas. In most situations involving free-roaming cats, a deterrent will likely be the most practical approach.

1. Deterrents

In our experience, the motion-activated sprinkler is by far the most effective deterrent when the area in question is well-defined, such as a garden or a backyard, and not too large. The other deterrents listed below have worked for others and may work for you, too.

Motion-activated sprinklers

A motion-activated sprinkler works just as its name suggests. The device emits an infra-red field which covers the area you're trying to protect. When a cat enters the field, the sprinkler shoots off a loud and violent burst of water in her general direction that lasts a few seconds. Rarely will the cat be hit by the spray; rather, the cat becomes frightened and runs off. Before long, cats learn the boundaries of the infra-red field, avoid entering it and, eventually, the sprinkler is rarely triggered. Because water is needed, the device will not function in freezing temperatures. The trick is to start using it in warmer weather so the cats are trained to stay away by winter. Motion-activated sprinklers on the market include:

The Scarecrow by Contech

This product detects motion up to 45 feet away and covers a maximum area of 1300 square feet. The device must be connected to a water source via a hose and operates for six months on one 9 volt battery. Multiple units can be connected via hoses to one another, requiring only one water source. The distance of the spray and area covered are adjustable, as is the sensitivity of the device to detecting motion. Changing these variables can prevent cats from growing accustomed to the device. It can be purchased directly from the manufacturer at www.contech-inc.com or call 1-800-767-8658. If you do an online search for other retail outlets, you may find it at a lower price. Try Safe Pet Products (www.safepetproducts.com or call 1-888-977-7387) or search Amazon (www.amazon.com).

Spray Away by Havahart

This device's advertised coverage of 1000 square feet and range of motion detection of 35 feet are slightly less than those claimed by the Scarecrow. Similar to The Scarecrow, it operates on one 9 volt battery, has adjustable settings and can have multiple units linked to one water source. Available at www.havahart.com.

Spray Away Elite by Havahart

This new product operates in a manner similar to other motion-activated sprinklers, but is hose-free. Because it contains its own 3.5 gallon reservoir, it does not need to be connected to another water source and has great mobility in terms of placement. Another innovative feature is its lifetime battery which is recharged by solar panels located on top of the unit. Its motion-detecting range is listed at 35 feet and coverage area is 1000 square feet. It is more expensive than models which require hose

connections, so you might want to limit its use to situations where a hose is unavailable or impractical. Go to www.havahart.com.

Ultrasonic devices

An ultrasonic device, like a motion-activated sprinkler, emits an infra-red field. When a cat steps into the field, the device gives off a high frequency sound annoying to cats, but not perceptible by people. The key to their effectiveness is making sure the device or devices have the capacity to cover the size of the area you're trying to guard. Otherwise, they won't work. In our experience, ultrasonic devices have received mixed reviews. There are experienced feral cat groups which swear by them and use them in creative ways, such as mounting one on a garage, pointing down at a parking space to keep cats from jumping onto cars or placing two devices at opposite ends of a property line, facing one another, in order to keep cats from crossing the line. Other people, however, have reported the devices have no effect on the cats.

Part of the problem when the device doesn't have the desired effect may be that cats are smart. Because the device is motion-activated, it will turn off if the cat enters the territory and then stays still or hides behind a large object. As a result, it may take some trial and error and strategizing about placement of the device before the desired effect of keeping the cats away is achieved. If you're thinking of trying one, it might be wise to buy one or two first and test them out before making a larger investment. The devices work in all types of weather, though if you're using batteries, you may need to replace them more often in colder seasons. Models include:

CatStop by Contech

This is the most popular brand. One device covers 280 square feet and operates on either a 9 volt battery or, for purchase at an additional cost, an AC adaptor. Go to www.contech-inc.com or call 1-800-767-8658. A search for other online retailers of the product on Amazon (www.amazon.com) may turn up a lower price.

Yard Gard Ultrasonic Animal Repeller by Bird-X

The Yard Gard has an advertised range of 4,000 square feet, quite a bit larger than the CatStop. It can be set to be either motion-activated or produce sound continuously. We recommend using the motion-activated setting so the least amount of audio disturbance is created in the environment, which may contain other animals you don't want to repel. It operates on four "C" batteries or an AC adaptor. Go to www.bird-x.com or call 1-800-662-5021. You may find lower prices for the product at other online outlets by searching Amazon (www.amazon.com).

Scent repellents

Reports on the effectiveness of scent repellents are mixed, sometimes working quite well and at other times, not at all. Scent repellents should be sprayed or placed around the edges of the yard, the tops of fences and on any favorite digging areas or plants. Sprays will need to be replenished frequently and especially after rain. Chemically based repellents often contain the active ingredient methyl nonyl ketone. Manufacturers claim this ingredient is safe, but also warn the chemical is poisonous and should not be applied to food crops. Because of the possible risks, we recommend using chemically-based scent repellents only if they will be used in a closed container. Otherwise, we recommend naturally-based products, including the following:

Coleus Canina

This plant, a weed originating in Europe, is known as the "Scaredy-Cat" or "Pee-off" plant because it emits an odor offensive to cats (but not to humans). They should be planted three feet apart around the area to be protected. To obtain them, you may need to order cuttings or seeds from a nursery or dealer.

The order should be placed during the winter or early in the spring planting season before dealers run out of stock. **WARNING:** There are many varieties of Coleus plants, so be sure to buy the correct type – Coleus Canina. One online merchant specializing in Coleus plants is Rosy Dawn Gardens (www.rosydawngardens.com).

Critter Ridder Animal Repellent by Havahart

This all natural product can be purchased in either granular or spray form. It is advertised as compliant for use in organic gardening, safe for children and pets and effective for thirty days with one application. Go to www.havahart.com.

Household items

Anecdotal reports indicate some degree of success from sprinkling or dripping in gardens or flower beds one or more of the following items: orange, grapefruit or lemon rinds (cats dislike citrus smells), coffee grounds, pipe tobacco, lavender oil, lemongrass oil, peppermint oil, eucalyptus oil, and mustard oil.

Barriers to digging

Cats may be attracted to gardens and flower beds because they like digging in the soil and doing their business. Creating physical barriers to digging is one way to keep them away. Products or items include:

Cat Scat Mats from Gardener's Supply

These are plastic mats with flexible spikes sticking up out of them. You press them into the soil, spikes facing upwards. While they're harmless to cats and other animals, they're irritating and discourage excavation. Go to Gardener's Supply (www.gardeners.com) or call 1-888-833-1412.

Rocks

Cover exposed ground with rocks that have rough surfaces to deter a cat from touching or trying to move them.

Lattice

Lay lattice fencing on the ground prior to planting, then plant flowers or seeds in the openings.

Make an Outdoor Litter box

One way to keep the cats from using the garden or the lawn to poop or pee is by giving them somewhere more attractive to go. A child's sandbox, strategically situated in a far corner of the yard, should do the trick. Regular sandbox sand is inexpensive. It should be scooped out regularly and, occasionally, completely replaced. A large pile of peat moss, approximately four feet square and eight inches deep, has also been reported to be effective. It too should be scooped out regularly and, once a month or so, entirely replaced.

If you want the outdoor litter box to be contained, you can make one out of a large 30 or 55 gallon Rubbermaid storage bin (also called a storage "tote"). Using a box-cutter, slice open a doorway in one of the narrower sides of the bin, making the bottom of the doorway several inches above the ground. An 8" x 8" opening will work. Then fill the bin up to the bottom of the doorway with regular sandbox sand or, if you prefer, cat litter. Cover the bin with its lid. If you can, put a couple of pieces of the cats' stool in the sand to help draw them over. Scoop occasionally and once a month or so, dump and replace the sand or litter.

You can also put a regular litter box with litter inside the storage bin after you've cut open a doorway. You'll likely then need to clean it out on a daily basis.

2. Containment systems

When possible, the best way to avoid problems with neighbors is to keep the cats confined to your own backyard or property. Special fencing is available to accomplish this.

Free-standing fences

Purrfect Fence

The Purrfect Fence is made up of metal posts and plastic grid fencing which blends in well with its surroundings. Inwardly arched tops prevent climbing over the fence and ground stakes every two feet prevent digging under. It can be installed around very large open spaces with your budget being the only real limitation. The product has been installed at the Hemingway House in Key West, Florida, keeping the famous six-toed cats from wandering off the grounds and into the neighborhood. Discounts are available for 501(c)(3) rescues and shelters. Go to www.purrfectfence.com or call 1-888-280-4066.

Attachments to an existing fence

Attachments can be added to the top of an existing fence to keep the cats from climbing over. These systems consist of inward leaning posts and special fencing material. Before ordering, make sure the product you want to purchase complies with any zoning requirements in your area, particularly height restrictions on fences. There are a few to choose from:

Purrfect Fence

The company makes a system which can be added to existing fences as well as the free-standing system previously mentioned. Discounts are available for 501(c)(3) rescues and shelters. Go to www.purrfectfence.com or call 1-888-280-4066.

Cat Fence-In

Go to www.cاتفencein.com or call 1-888-738-9099.

Affordable Cat Fence

Go to www.cاتفence.com or call 1-888-840-2287.

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