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There are ways to redirect the cats to an unused corner of your yard where you don't mind their presence. Create a separate spot that is appealing to cats by planting catnip or catmint there.

# Facing fearless felines

Cats can cause chaos in a garden, but there are several ways to kindly encourage them to leave tender plants alone

**Q**uestion: My neighborhood is being overrun with cats and they are such a nuisance in my garden. They're using my garden as the community litter box, leaving their unpleasant smells and feces as well as digging up my bulbs and tender plants. What can I do to discourage cats from doing their business in my yard?

**A**nswer: Neighborhood or stray cats can be a huge problem for home gardeners. Not only can they be destructive by digging up your plants, but their "messes" are also unhealthy for people, being carriers of certain harmful bacteria.

It's a challenge to address this problem and still keep harmony with your neighbors. Maybe you can work together with your cat-loving neighbors to keep the peace.

There are a number of things you can try – from deterrents and repellents, to redirecting – in order to discourage cats from coming to your yard,

- Cover trash cans tightly or secure lids with bungee cords so they aren't attracted to food scraps.

- Scatter fragrant items around your plants like fresh orange peels, vinegar, coffee grounds, and registered repellent products containing oils of cinnamon, clove, thyme, or garlic – scents that



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are unpleasant to felines. When using a repellent product, realize you may need to reapply it often as the scent wears off.

- Plant the herb, rue, in your garden or sprinkle dried rue over areas to be protected.

- Bare, loose soil or soil covered in bark mulch attracts cats so consider covering flower beds that have exposed ground with large, attractive river rocks to keep the cats from digging.

- Use chicken wire or plastic carpet runners (spiked-side up) lightly covered with soil to cover bare ground areas. You can also embed wooden chopsticks, pine cones, or sticks with dull points deep into the soil with the tops exposed eight inches apart. Cats hate to walk over these.

- Install an ultrasonic animal repellent which emits an unpleasant sound only cats can hear. Or set up a motion-activated water sprinkler such as ScareCrow.

Then there are ways to redirect the cats to an unused corner of your yard where you don't mind their presence.



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It's a challenge to address cat problems and still keep harmony with your neighbors. Maybe you can work together with your cat-loving neighbors to keep the peace.

Create a separate spot that is appealing to cats by planting catnip or catmint there.

You could place litter boxes (wood frames with sand or peat moss which would absorb water – not using actual cat litter) in strategic spots to give cats an alternative place to relieve themselves. Be sure to keep these boxes and areas clean, changing out the contents regularly.

Remember that cats like clean areas – if you don't remove their waste often

enough, they'll eventually relocate to unwelcome areas like your garden.

There's probably no "purr-rr-fect" solution, but a combination of these techniques should help reduce the problem without causing disharmony with your neighbors.

However, in the case of tom cats marking their territory, live trapping may be necessary. In such cases, talk with your neighbors first to get their consent. Return the cat to its owner after trapping it, or in

the case of feral cats, trapping and taking them to a local animal shelter may be the only solution.

*Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at [douglasmg@oregonstate.edu](mailto:douglasmg@oregonstate.edu) or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.*