



Guidelines for Feeding Feral and Community Cats

Feral and free roaming cats are well adapted to their surroundings, and often easily find food and shelter, whether you see it or not. If the cat arrived looking fed and healthy, chances are he is just that, and has one (or many!) food sources. Adding another food source to the environment may unwillingly attract new cats to your location, or bring unwanted wildlife to your yard.

Whether or not you choose to provide food for a feral cat or colony is up to you. The decision should be based on a variety of factors.

- Do you know for sure that no one else is providing food?
- Did the cat appear seemingly unfed and in need of attention, or was he/she trapped while just passing through your location? Many females will choose a location other than their regular environment to give birth, so if the cat you've trapped was a pregnant or nursing mother, chances are she has another locale to return to, and you will not see her again.
- Do you have the means to provide food?
- Do you wish to become a regular feeder of community cats, or was TNR the focus of your becoming involved with these cats? Providing a consistent feeding station for a feral, or multiple feral cats, can mean attracting newcomers. Do you feel confident you will take on trapping any and all new cats for TNR?

If you choose to provide a regular feeding schedule

Ideally, a feral cat or colony should be fed once daily or every other day at the same time, in the same location. Stick to a regular schedule if you can. Consistent feeding will make trapping easier and help you, the caretaker, form a timed relationship with the cats.

Dry food is recommended. Wet food tends to attract insects and wildlife.

Feeding during the day is the best option. Before sunrise and after sunset is the most likely time for unwanted wildlife to appear.

Caretakers often build a shelter for food, or use a turned over container or wooden box. Keeping food dishes off the direct ground will not only make clean up easier, it will help control insects and other pests.

Other ways to deter insects, should they become a problem:

- Place a tray or flowerpot tray with about half an inch to an inch of water in it on the feeding station platform and then place the food bowl on the tray.

*- Surround the food bowl with a ring of baking soda or **food-grade diatomaceous earth** (available from some natural food stores and environmentally conscious pet-care supply companies). The diatom dust should be reapplied after rainstorms.*

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- Keep feeding areas clean, and always remove feeding dishes within 30 minutes.

How much food? Observe the cats and use your discretion based on the time it takes for the food to be eaten. If the cats eat all of the food in 15 minutes or less, consider putting out a bit more. If there is consistently food remaining after a half hour, put out a bit less.

Remove all uneaten food within 30 minutes. Never, under any circumstances, leave food out anywhere other than your own, protected and private property. Leaving food unattended and uneaten can attract wildlife, insects and other unwanted creatures. Keeping a clean and tidy feeding station is of paramount importance to keeping a positive view of feral cat feeders in the community.

A note about daily feeding: If you choose to provide food, and do so on a daily basis, the cat(s) may become dependent on you as their primary food source. If they currently have other sources, they may abandon those and increase the visits to your area. Committing to feeding feral cats often means a commitment for many years. Often times, if there is not a compelling reason to be the daily feeder, it is recommended to feed just intermittently, perhaps a few days a week, rather than daily, to avoid unwillingly becoming the sole provider of meals to a colony.