

Cats and gardens



Cats are protected by law, are free to roam and know no boundaries. By observing some simple guidelines, cat owners and non cat owners, alike, can ensure that they and their neighbours enjoy a harmonious home and garden environment.

Promoting responsible cat ownership

Cat owners are responsible for their cats' needs, whilst also having to respect the needs of those living around them. The three points below will help you to maintain a contented cat – *and* contented neighbours – through promoting responsible pet ownership.

- **The neutering of all cats not required for breeding**

A neutered cat is less likely to wander looking for a mate, is less likely to spray, will be less aggressive and territorial and, as a result, become more homely and content. Most importantly, neutered cats will not produce unwanted kittens.

- **Providing a happy and stress-free home and garden**

If a cat is content within his own environment, he is more likely to stay within his *own* home and garden. Ensuring your cat is well fed discourages him from hunting and wandering off in search of food. Keeping him in at night may also deter him from venturing into neighbours' gardens. For more information, please see our leaflet *What makes a cat-friendly home* (617).

- **Identifying your cat**

If a cat becomes lost, injured, trapped or involved in a dispute between neighbours, it is important that the cat can be easily identified. Cats Protection advocates microchipping as the safest and most reliable means of identification. The use of collars is not recommended, as these can get caught in trees, in a cat's legs or become wedged in their mouths, causing serious injury or even death.





Spraying and messing

This is a big problem for many gardeners. Cats spray for various reasons – mainly to mark their territory. This becomes more pronounced when cats are not confident in their surroundings, for example: when there is a strange cat in the area; when they are stressed; when something new has been introduced; or, you have just moved your cat to a new home – see our leaflet, *Spraying*, (610). In some cases, this also applies to when a cat messes on the lawn – he is simply marking his territory. (As a rule, cats prefer to dig and bury their faeces). If this happens, clear the mess immediately and hose the area down or it will burn the grass, leaving a dead patch. To deter cats messing on the lawn, keep the grass well mown, as they prefer long grass to short for this purpose.

When planning plant positions in the garden, keep in mind that cats tend to mark their territory at prominent positions – especially at entrances or protruding corners. Hardy plants should be used in such positions. Speak to your local garden centre about suitable plants or use tall planters (at least 60cm high) which prevent the cat spray from reaching the plant, itself.

Garden design

Garden design which takes a cat's needs into account will result in a happier pet, happier homeowner and, ultimately, happier neighbours.

The garden layout on pages 6–7 provides some useful hints and tips for both cat and non cat owners. Features (numbered to coincide with key on page 6) include the following:-

1 His own toilet

Since cats prefer to bury their faeces, they need a suitable area for this purpose. If one is not provided, the cat will use newly-dug ground – especially the fine earth of a seed bed. He will also like fallen leaves, grass cuttings, gravel on drives and sandpits. He may be inclined to use long grass if the earth is too hard in which to dig a hole.

To create your cat's own toilet, provide a secluded, sheltered area of well-dug, fine soil. Initially, add some used cat litter, as your cat's own odours will encourage him to use this area. Bark can also be used – some cats prefer this to soil and it does not make their paws muddy. The area must be turned regularly to remain hygienic and allow the soiled material to decompose naturally.



2 Toileting deterrents

Various methods designed to discourage cats from toileting in undesirable places have been tried over the years – some more effective than others. However, cats are astute and may ignore deterrents.

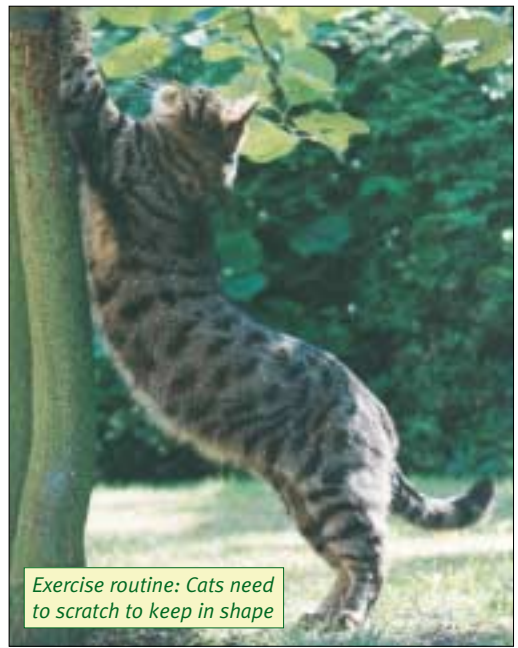
To discourage cats from using flower borders as a toilet, consider trying some of the following:

- Close cultivation of shrubs. This is the best method, as it prevents cats from finding a space to dig.
- Netting at ground level which allows plants to grow through.
- Placing stone chippings or pebbles over the entire border. This is especially suitable for perennials and makes an ideal weed suppressant.
- Spreading chicken manure around the borders (only use Soil Association approved pellets, not fresh manure). This is a new and proven method.

Apart from the fact that cats do not like the smell, this may also benefit established plants. Be careful with tender plants, however, as the excess nitrogen burns them. Chicken manure is marketed through most garden centres.



*A natural medicine:
Cats need grass*



Exercise routine: Cats need to scratch to keep in shape

3 Grass area

Cats need grass – it is a natural medicine for relieving bile and sourness and is particularly useful for cats that are prone to hairballs. For more information see our leaflet *Cats need grass* (745).

Cocksfoot grass (*dactylis glomerata*) is particularly favoured and can be included as a feature in a garden, preferably in the cat's own area. Seeds are available on receipt of an A5 SAE from Cats Protection Headquarters. Although ornamental grasses are increasing in popularity, they are not suitable for cats to chew on: they can get lodged in their mouths, throats, and can even cause lacerations.

Poisonous plants

Generally, cats tend not to eat plants that would be harmful to them, but it is advisable to avoid growing deadly nightshade, lily of the valley, laburnum and foxglove.

Warning: Lilies are extremely toxic to cats and, if displayed indoors, should be kept well out of their reach.

4 Play area

The creation of an outdoor play area for your cat will not only address his needs, but will also help to protect features in your garden.

Scratching

Cats need to scratch – it's their way of keeping in shape, as their muscles are exercised and toned when so doing. Cats' paws have scent glands, and scratching is another way to mark their territory. This also keeps their claws trimmed. Including a scratching post in the play area helps to prevent delicate shrubs or trees from being clawed. An old wooden post would ideally serve this purpose.

Shelter from the elements

Your garden can be the perfect place for your cat to rest and play. However, like humans, some cats are susceptible to skin damage caused by the harmful rays of the sun – particularly white cats or those with sparse hair. It is best to keep susceptible cats in between 11am–3pm when the sun is at its hottest. However, as this is not

always practical, plan the garden layout to provide a retreat and shade for your cat on hot, sunny days. Established bushes – preferably without prickles – are recommended. Additionally protect those areas on your cat that are at risk, ie ears and nose, with a sun protection product containing titanium dioxide and offering UVA/UVB protection.

Additional attractions

Always keep a clean supply of drinking water available in a bowl. You might also wish to install a decorative pebble pool and fountain where cats can drink without falling in. Fishponds are not advisable, for obvious reasons; however, if you do have one, add a shallow, wet boggy area around the perimeter. This deters cats from getting at your prize fish, as cats do not like getting their feet wet. Alternatively, consider covering the pond with netting.

For an added bonus, grow some Catnip [*nepeta cataria*]. Cats love this and will roll around on it and become very playful – a treat for him in his very own patch.



Sun screen: Provide a shady retreat



**“Garden design
which takes a cat’s needs
into account will result in a
happier pet, happier homeowner
and, ultimately, happier neighbours”**



6 Fencing

It is a good idea to have a secure garden. A two-metre high, close-boarded fence together with a hedge will encourage your cat to remain within your garden and make it difficult for other cats to visit.

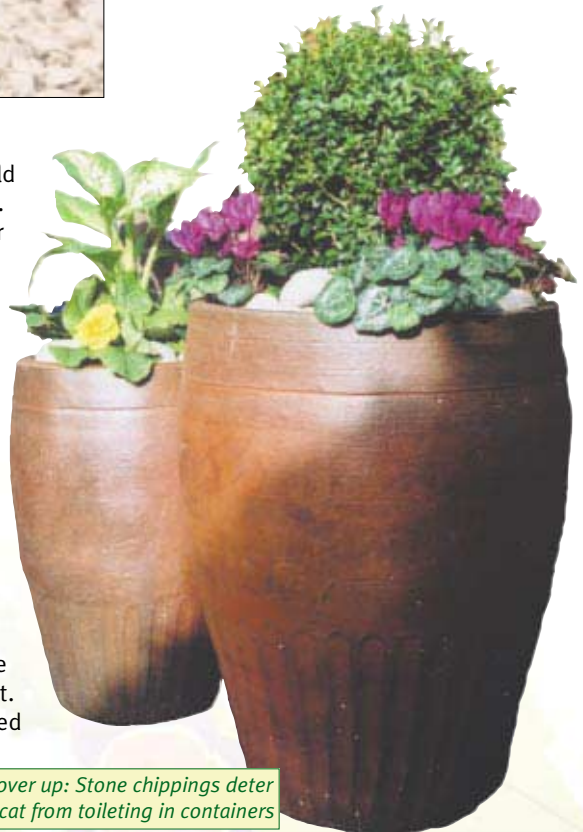
However, since cats do tend to wander a compromise has to be accepted, and they will need a handy route for their return. In this instance, a mature tree would allow your cat to climb back into the garden – rather than having to jump and possibly hurt himself. Depending on the circumstances, you may wish to add a structure to the top of your fence to restrict your cat to your garden. A detailed information sheet on this, kindly sent in by one of our members, is available, as are all our leaflets, by calling our Helpline on 08702 099 099.

Security

Provide an escape route for your cat, should a strange dog wander in to your garden. Consider a cat flap to your house and/or outbuildings or provide somewhere your cat can jump up onto such as a garden table, feature wall or a mature tree. Cats like to sit high up, so these will provide both an added benefit, as well as interest.

5 Containers

Annual plants are very popular and make a colourful addition to any garden. Using tubs and other containers, like old chimney pots, is the best way to keep cats off plants. Gardeners will also find these easier to maintain. Large containers should have stone chippings around the top to minimise the risk of a cat using them as a toilet. Chippings are now available in coloured varieties, giving an attractive effect.



Cover up: Stone chippings deter a cat from toileting in containers



Security measure: Fencing encourages your cat to stay within his boundaries

7 Front garden

This presents its own problems – especially if it needs to remain open plan. Front garden design need not be suited to your cat, but should aim more towards discouraging other cats and even dogs from using it as a public toilet.

To achieve this, the layout should be more straightforward, with no exposed borders for flowers or plants. Again, if annuals are desired, use planters, covering their tops with stone chippings. Hardy perennials can be planted in the ground with a stone border filled in with stone chippings.

Another appealing feature that can be reasonably protected is a rockery. This can either be close cultivated or use attractive rocks and stone chippings in conjunction with suitably hardy rockery plants. Avoid miniature fir trees or heathers, as these are easily killed by cat spray.

The clever use of pavers, blocks and cobbles, interspersed with ground-covering bushes or miniature box hedges, makes a popular alternative to lawn. The effect is imaginative, easy to keep tidy, and, more importantly, deters unwanted visiting cats.

8 Protection for wildlife

Other wildlife in or visiting your garden can be idyllic and sometimes desirable.

Being natural hunters, cats can be tempted to pursue this wildlife, such as mice, voles, squirrels, birds and rabbits. There are, however, ways you can protect the wildlife visiting your garden.

Recent surveys have found that, on average, cats hunt most in the first two or three years of their lives. After this, they tend to become more sedentary and more accepting of their environment. Thus, if younger cats can be kept

indoors in the early morning and at night, it should reduce the amount of prey being caught.

Birds are the most obvious prey in the domestic garden: they fly in and out with ease and, being quick-moving, attract a cat's attention, whereas slow-moving creatures tend to be ignored. Although bird tables are very popular for feeding birds and squirrels during the winter months, it is not advisable to attract birds to a garden with resident cats. However, if you should choose to, select a bird table with a platform on top of a tall pole, making it inaccessible to cats. Position away from trees and fences to restrict a cat's access.

If you have a freestanding greenhouse, birds can be fed on a specially-made platform positioned in the window vent. Cats cannot climb up the glass and metal exterior of a greenhouse.

9 Safety measures

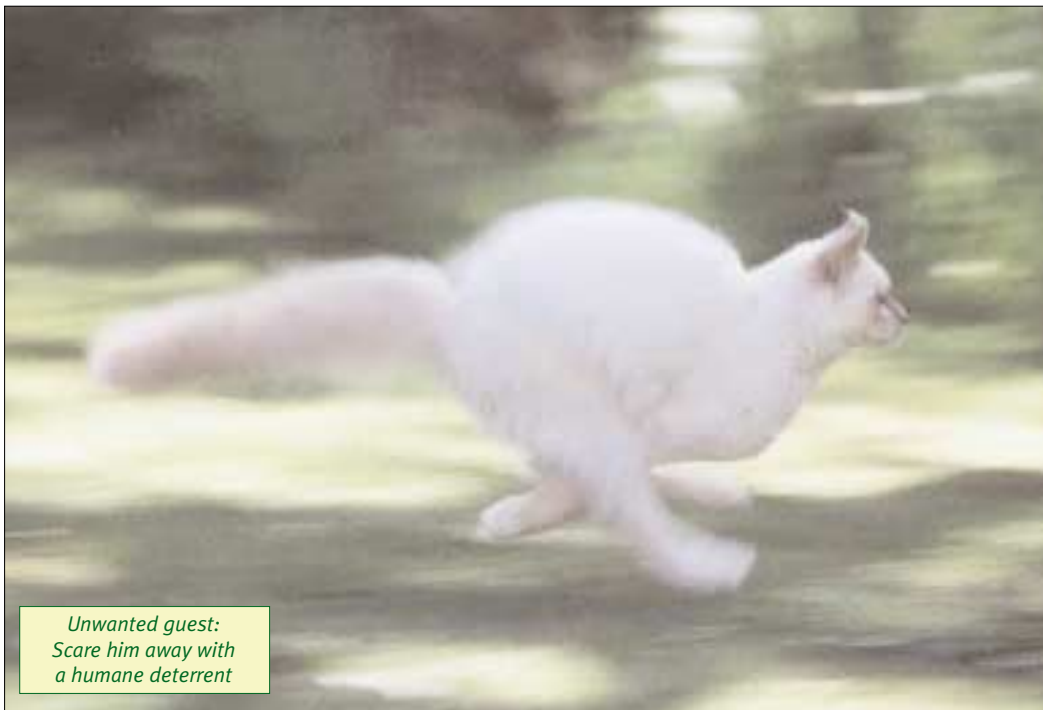
Pesticides and chemicals

Take extreme care when using pesticides, as a cat cleans his coat by licking and can ingest harmful substances which cause pain, suffering and even death. Store all pesticides, slug pellets and DIY chemicals in a secured area away from your cats, children and wildlife. Try to use only pet and child-safe products or, alternatively, choose organic and naturally safer methods of pest and weed control. If you suspect your cat has come into contact with anything potentially harmful, seek veterinary advice immediately.

Slugs and snails

There is no doubt that slugs and snails are a real menace to gardeners, but slug pellets can be dangerous to dogs, cats, children, birds and





*Unwanted guest:
Scare him away with
a humane deterrent*

hedgehogs – in fact, anything that moves. There are several environmentally-friendly slug pellets on the market. Other methods of control include: beer/milk traps; barriers; nematodes (*Nemaslug* by Microbio – see *The Cat* March/April 2001); or, armed with a torch and bucket collecting them after dark and disposing of them where they can provide a tasty meal for wildlife. Slugs and snails don't like moving over rough surfaces, so surrounding young plants with small stones, eggshells and sharp sand may deter them.

Top tip: Plants with thicker leaves, ie begonias and geraniums, seem less prone to attack by slugs and snails.

Preventative measures

Although cats are free-roaming creatures, it is accepted that some people do not want them in their gardens. There are ways to discourage a cat from entering your garden without causing him any harm.

Eliminate food sources

Scraps of food lying around is a big temptation for cats. Try not to leave food out for birds and squirrels and ensure dustbin lids are secure. Whatever you do, do not start feeding a cat if you don't want him around – he will come back for more.

Humane deterrents

There are various methods you can use to scare an unwanted cat from your garden:

- Shoo him away by either shouting or clapping your hands.
- Squirt water at him using a water pistol, being careful to avoid the eyes. After a while, the cat will learn not to stay too long in your garden, perhaps only using it en route.
- Emit a short, sharp, high-pitched noise, such as from a rape alarm.
- Install an automatic garden spray – a more costly method, but effective. The spray is triggered by an infra-red detector which locates movement.

Erect a fence

Build a close-boarded fence around your garden. Although this will not keep all cats out, it will make it less accessible for them. Most cats will subconsciously accept this as the limit of their territory. It's advisable to check fencing height restrictions with your local authority.

As an added deterrent, plant a hedge parallel to the fence; cats will find it difficult to climb over and, if it is as high as the fence, will not attempt to jump over.

Understanding cat behaviour

Understanding why a cat behaves and acts as he does may help you to deal with any problems or issues that you may have with a neighbour's cat.

Make sure it's a cat at fault before you tackle the problem

Gardens are vulnerable to many types of interference – not just feline. For example, hedgehog faeces are often found on lawns; dog faeces are smooth, whereas cats' faeces are segmented.

Cats and the law

A cat is a domestic animal and enjoys certain rights by law:

- He cannot be held guilty of trespass.
- It is an offence to steal a cat from his owner, ill-treat, beat or kick a cat, infuriate, terrify or torture a cat, cause him suffering, or fail to protect a cat or kitten from such cruelty.
- It is a serious offence to use airguns, crossbows, missiles, or similar weapons to maim or injure a cat.
- It is an offence to put down poison or set snares for a cat.

NB: Do not, under any circumstances, set a dog on a cat.

Cats are protected by the Protection of Animals Act 1911.

For ease of reading this leaflet, the cat has been referred to as a he. However the information contained in this leaflet applies to both male and female cats.



Page 8, cat through catflap, photo: GWN and ICA. All other photos: CP Library