



**Humane  
World for  
Animals™**

Formerly called the Humane  
Society of the United States

# Community cat feeding guide

Community cats, also referred to as feral or stray cats, often rely on human support to thrive, especially in urban and suburban areas. Feeding community cats can be a rewarding way to help your local feline population, but it's important to do so responsibly to ensure their health, the well-being of the community, and to avoid unintended consequences, such as attracting wildlife.



While feeding community cats, it's crucial not to intentionally feed wildlife, as this can lead to a wide range of issues. Wildlife attracted to cat feeding stations can pose a threat to the cats themselves, either through direct

predation or injury during encounters, or through the transmission of diseases, which may spread throughout the community cat population. Feeders may also find themselves in potentially dangerous situations if larger or more aggressive wildlife frequent the feeding areas. Furthermore, wildlife drawn to these areas may exhibit nuisance behaviors, such as rummaging through trash or damaging property, which can lead to conflicts with neighbors and potential repercussions for those feeding the cats.

By adhering to the best practices in this guide and avoiding the intentional feeding of wildlife, you can help protect community cats, maintain a safer environment, and foster better relations within the community.

## 1. Legal Considerations

**Know the Laws:** Be aware of any regulations regarding feeding community cats in your area. Checking in with your local animal control is recommended, as some areas may have specific laws or guidelines that you need to follow.

## 2. Establish a Feeding Schedule

**Consistency is Key:** Cats thrive on routine. Feed cats at the same time and place once or twice every day.

**Timing:** Feed during daylight hours to minimize the attraction of nocturnal wildlife like raccoons, opossums, and skunks. Reducing interactions between cats and wildlife is good for everyone.

**Be Punctual:** Consistency helps cats know when to expect food and prevents them from scavenging. If you are going out of town, ask a friend or neighbor to feed the cats at their regular time for you.

**Limit Feeding Duration:** Take away any uneaten food after 30 minutes to prevent attracting pests and wildlife.

## 3. Hygiene Practices

**Use Clean Dishes:** Avoid placing food directly on the ground. Use clean bowls or plates and remove them after every use.

## Hygiene Practices (Continued)

**Portion Control:** Provide only as much food as the cats will eat at one sitting (approximately ½ - ¾ cup of kibble a day per cat, depending on the size and age of the cat and quality of the food). Cats will eat about 15% more in cold weather.

**Dispose of Leftovers:** Remove any uneaten food, bowls/plates, cans, and scraps after 30 minutes to prevent attracting pests and wildlife, to ensure freshness of the food, and to reduce the risk of disease.

**Fresh Water:** Always provide clean, fresh water along with the food.

## 4. Feeding Location

**Use Feeding Stations:** If necessary, use designated feeding stations to protect food from the elements and reduce the risk of attracting wildlife. Feeding stations elevated at least 6 feet above ground by a smooth post (and fitted with a skirt of aluminum flashing) can deter animals such as raccoons and opossums who are unable to jump vertically. These feeding stations can also provide protection for community cats from wildlife if they're positioned at least 6 feet away from trees and other structures and provide two entrances/exits.



Covered feeding stations may also protect cat food from vultures, pigeons and inclement weather.

**Choose a Safe, Quiet Spot:** Keep away from busy roads, foot traffic, and potential dangers. A secluded spot will help cats feel secure and reduce disturbances.

**Avoid Sensitive Wildlife Habitats:** Placing feeding stations away from sensitive wildlife habitats will help to concentrate cat activity in controlled areas and reduce wildlife predation. If you are unsure where these areas are, consider checking in with your local animal control and/or wildlife agencies.

**Remove Bird Feeders:** Don't attract both birds and cats to your property by feeding both in the same space.

## 5. Monitor and Adjust

**Keep Track:** Keep a log of feeding times, specific cats, and any health observations, and seek veterinary care if necessary. Noting which cats show up regularly, the presence of new cats, and any signs of sickness or injury can help you better manage your cat population.



**Feeding Area Checks:** Monitor the feeding area for signs of wildlife activity or other issues. Use motion-activated trail cameras periodically to see what happens at the feeding location when you are not around. Adjust your practices as needed to address any problems, such as moving the feeding station or changing feeding times.

## 6. Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) Programs

**Support TNR:** Ensure the cats you feed are spayed or neutered and vaccinated through a local TNR program. Neutering/spaying also reduces unwanted behaviors associated with mating, such as spraying and fighting.

**Collaboration:** Work with local organizations in TNR efforts to manage the community cat population humanely.

## 7. Community Relations

**Respect Neighbors:** Ensure your feeding activities do not disturb your neighbors. Communicate openly and address any concerns they may have.

**Education:** Inform others about the benefits of caring for community cats and encourage them to adopt responsible practices.

Responsible feeding of community cats involves more than just providing food — it requires consideration for their health, the environment, and the surrounding wildlife. By following these best practices, you can contribute positively to the welfare of community cats while minimizing negative impacts on the ecosystem.



For more information, visit [humaneworld.org/catsandwildlife](https://humaneworld.org/catsandwildlife)