

# The world is their litter box

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I get many calls in early summer (especially when the humidity soars), regarding problems with neighborhood cats. Outside cats, especially those not your own, can create difficult problems. As a cat owner, you should consider ways to minimize your cat annoying your neighbors. You could keep your cat inside, supervise your cat when outside, bring it inside at night, etc.

## Outdoor cat problems:

**Bare Soil = Ready-made Kitty Litter!**

Between digging and eating in your plants, cats can do considerable damage to gardens, flowerbeds and around foundations. There are a number of ways to keep cats from digging in, chewing on or eliminating around these areas.

**\*Replace the "used" soil.** If an area has been used for a litter box for an extended period of time, it is important to remove the soil and replace it with fresh topsoil.

**\*Bare soil.** This is perfect for a "natural" litter box. The simplest solution is don't leave any bare soil. Plant anything—rue, roses or whatever you fancy—just don't leave any bare soil. Use decorative rock, grass clippings or chicken wire on top of the soil between plants until the plants fill in that space. Several sources, including one gardener in the Lincoln area, report that chicken wire, laid on the bare soil, is great for keeping cats out of gardens and away from foundations. Apparently, cats don't like to walk on chicken wire.

**\*Alternative sites.** Some people have successfully kept cats out of most of their yard by

planting catnip in a far corner of the yard or garden. By doing this, they confine the destruction to one spot.

**\*Deterrents.** Most cats hate water—especially bursts of water. Surprise the offenders with a squirt gun. Or, turn on your sprinklers when the cats approach their favorite "potty-spot."

**\*Repellents.** There are a variety of repellent products available for cats and dogs. Check with your favorite pet store or veterinarian. You may be limited to where you can apply the product. There may also be limitations (and many reapplications) if it rains or if you water the area.

## Spraying and Marking Territory

If the offender is your cat, spay or neuter your pet to help reduce the urge for territorial marking. (Note: spraying could also be the result of a medical condition. Check with your veterinarian). Keep your cat indoors—this will diminish the scent of your cat around the property. Neighborhood cats may not be as tempted to mark your property if they don't smell your cat.

If the offender is not your cat, you can call Animal Control (441-7900) to solve the problem. This agency can work with you to trap and remove the offending animals. There is no charge to trap and remove cats in Lincoln. In Lancaster County, Animal Control will rent you a trap for \$30 which is refundable when the trap is returned.

Property that has been sprayed, will need to be cleaned thoroughly. There are commercial products that will help eliminate cat odors. Check with your local pet store/supplier or veterinarian. In some instances, where cat spray has saturated a



wood surface (like your front door), the finish will need to be stripped, sanded and refinished to eliminate the odor.

## Other Outdoor Problems

**Cats stalking at bird feeders.** Locate your bird feeder in an area where the cats cannot hide and spring on the birds. At the same time, try to locate it under something, like a tree, to provide refuge from attack by other birds like hawks.

**Cat Noise.** Mating cats can make an unbelievable amount of noise under your window. The same can be said for "fighting cats." If the cats belong to you, be responsible:

**\*Spay and/or neuter your cats.**

If the cats belong to a neighbor, use a non-confrontational approach to discuss the matter—make sure you're not "threatening." When approached reasonably, most people can be reasonable in turn. Sometimes your neighbor just doesn't know his/her cat is bothering you.

If you don't know who the cat belongs to, contact Animal Control to get assistance in trapping and removing the cat(s).

Cats are wonderful pets. I know, because I have two terrific cats. But, with cat ownership comes responsibility.

**\*Keep your cats indoors.** If you want to take them outside for brief periods, supervise their activities. Respect the property of your neighbors, keep your cats in your own yard. Neutering your cat can prevent many of the problems that have been discussed in this article.

wash treated skin with soap and water.

Wash treated clothing before wearing it again.

Use of DEET-containing products may cause skin reactions in rare cases.

On aerosol and pump spray formulation labels:

Do not spray in enclosed areas.

To apply to face, spray on hands first and then rub on face. Do not spray directly onto face.

Certain products that contained less than 15% DEET were claiming to be safer to children. The EPA is no longer allowing child safety claims on these products, because the scientific data does not support this claim.

If you are still concerned about using DEET on exposed skin, apply it to clothing. DEET will not damage clothing made of nylon, cotton or wool fabrics, but do not apply DEET near plastics acetate, rayon, spandex or other synthetic fabrics.

Source: EPA website: <http://www.epa.gov/pesticides/citizens/deet.htm> (BPO)

## Environmental Focus



# "What can I spray around my house to keep bugs out?"



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This is a very common question that comes into the extension office. This article discusses how we answer this question.

It is true that the vast majority of "bugs" that show up inside the house, come in from outside. Only a few (cockroaches, silverfish and some pantry pests that feed on stored food are examples), actually live and reproduce inside the house. We call the critters that wander into the house, "accidental invaders". The most common accidental invaders include most ants, sowbugs, pillbugs, millipedes, centipedes, crickets and spiders. Most of the time, these pests do not survive very well inside the home.



Sometimes we create situations around the house that are attractive to "bugs". For example, several invading pests live in mulch or wood chips. When you place large quantities of mulch near your house, you may be increasing the population of millipedes, sowbugs and pillbugs, crickets and their predators (spiders and centipedes). We are not trying to discourage the use of mulch because it is great stuff, but it is very attractive to a lot of small insects and arthropods.

No one management tactic,

including a perimeter spray, will effectively keep all insects from coming into your home. In addition, insecticides break down with the ultraviolet rays in sunlight and may be effective for only a few days.

We do not recommend routine use of a perimeter treatment to prevent entry by accidental invaders. Instead, homeowners should caulk cracks and crevices and remedy those situations outside that are conducive to these pests. When invading insects come into the house, a vacuum cleaner is often as effective as any insecticides in eliminating them. When a pest problem arises, actions other than insecticides, inside or outside the house, will usually be much more effective.

Unfortunately, many people think that home ownership requires routine spraying around the house for pests. Most of the time, a perimeter treatment does not control any pest problem. Instead, the application causes unnecessary risk to the person applying the pesticide, children or pets and unnecessary environmental hazards. Instead of routine monthly spraying, we encourage a little tolerance and a common sense approach to pests that they may find around the home.

Call the extension office for assistance with insect pest problems. We provide free diagnostic services and advice based on using least toxic controls. We do recommend insecticides on occasion, when using a chemical is the best approach. Call 441-7180, 8 a.m. - noon, M-F.

# Read the label before purchasing and using DEET

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) receives nearly 10,000 reports of Lyme disease (tick-vector) and 1,000 reports of encephalitis (transmitted by mosquitoes) annually. Both of these diseases are serious. Where these diseases are found, the CDC recommends using insect repellents when out-of-doors. Studies submitted to the EPA indicated the DEET repels ticks for three to eight hours, depending on the percentage of DEET in the product.

DEET is an acronym for diethyltoluamide, an extremely effective repellent of mosquitoes, ticks, mites and blood-feeding flies and gnats. It was developed by the U.S. Army in 1946 and was registered for use by the general population in 1957. Over 200 products containing DEET are currently registered with the EPA. These products contain from 4 to 100% DEET.

Because there have been some recent concerns about the safety of DEET, especially with children, the EPA recently conducted a comprehensive

reassessment of this repellent and released its findings in April, 1998. The EPA has made some changes on the label, but has said that as long as consumers follow these new label directions, the agency believes that normal use of DEET does not present a health concern to the general population.

To use DEET products safely, read the product labels carefully. Statements on all DEET product labels will be revised to include the following directions:

Read and follow all directions and precautions on the product label.

Do not apply over cuts, wounds or irritated skin.

Do not apply to hands or near eyes and mouth of young children.

Do not allow young children to apply this product.

Use just enough repellent to cover exposed skin and/or clothing.

Do not use under clothing. Avoid over-application of this product.

After returning indoors,

## Household hazardous waste collection June 26

Lancaster County residents can bring household hazardous wastes to the following collection site:

Saturday, June 26, Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD), 9 a.m. - 3 p.m., 3140 "N" Street, south parking lot.

Items that you can bring for disposal:

Heavy metals: items containing mercury such as thermometers and thermostats. Fluorescent bulbs and many batteries contain heavy metals, but can now be recycled locally.

Solvents: mineral spirits, turpentine, paint strippers and thinners, oil-based paints, varnishes.

Pesticides: weed killers, garden sprays, wood preservatives, roach powder, rat poisons. You may also bring banned products, like DDT, chlordane, 2,4,5-T, pentachlorophenol, silvex.

PCBs: Ballasts from old fluorescent fixtures and capacitors from old appliances including radios, motors and televisions.

Leave products in their original container and keep the label intact. Open, leaking or rusted containers should be placed in a clear plastic bag during transport. Do not mix chemicals.

Do not bring latex paint, medicines, explosives, fertilizers, used oil, general household trash, antifreeze or batteries. For more specific information, call the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8040. (BPO)