

Cats at Work (CAW) FAQs

How will the cats know to stay in our yard?

The cats will acclimate for three weeks in large dog crates. Tree House brings two 48" XXL sized dog crates, knocks down the short sides in the middle and wire-ties them together to make one large 8' long crate. There will be shelters, litter box, scratching pads, food, etc. inside.

Is there a cost to get cats?

Yes, there is a cost to take part in this program. Your payment will go towards all of the vetting for your cats, the installation and break-down of the acclimation crates that we can lend, and the products you will keep for your colony. This includes outdoor, insulated shelters, a covered litter box, outdoor heating pads, and a heated water bowl.

Are the cats spayed/neutered and vaccinated?

Yes. Every cat is spayed (female) or neutered (male) and have up to date rabies and FVRCP (rhinotracheitis, calicivirus and panleukopenia) vaccines. They are also microchipped.

Can I get just one cat?

Yes, but two or more is a better option. Cats are social creatures and typically live in colonies outside. A solo cat is more likely to take off in search of better feline social life. A bonded pair or threesome is more likely to stay.

Where does Tree House get these cats?

Cats at Work (CAW) cats come from existing Tree House sponsored feral cat colonies that are in need of relocation due to habitat unsuitability. Tree House also pulls displaced feral cats from municipalities such as Chicago Animal Care & Control.

We have rats that are getting into our house? Can we get cats for inside?

Tree House does not recommend bringing feral cats into your home. Feral cats are used to being outside and become overly stressed in captivity and in close proximity with people. They would likely hide under a bed or in a closet and may urinate or defecate in undesired locations because they are too terrified to venture out to the litter box.



Someone in our family is allergic to cats. Will that be an issue?

No. We have clients with cat allergies who enjoy their outdoor colonies without issue. Because the cats are afraid of humans, you and your family won't be getting close to them.

What does "feral" mean?

Feral means that a cat is un-socialized to humans. Feral cats are typically born outside, although feral cats can also be found indoors if they have not had sufficient human interaction. Conversely, there are many friendly stray cats outside.

Are the cats a danger to my kids?

No. Feral cats typically run from humans, so children will not get close to them.

Will the cats spread disease?

No. The vast majority of viruses affecting cats are species specific and will not affect humans. Cats are vaccinated against rabies.

What is toxoplasmosis and can I get it from the cats?

Toxoplasmosis is an infection caused by a microscopic parasite called *Toxoplasma gondii*. For a person with a healthy immune system the parasite very rarely causes illness. Cats get the *Toxoplasma* infection by eating infected rodents, birds or other small animals, or from infected soil. People can get toxoplasmosis by eating raw or undercooked meat, by ingesting contaminated soil, water or cat feces. After a cat has been infected, it can release the parasite in its feces for up to 20 days. In a healthy cat, the infection will go away on its own. Since the inception of Tree House's Community Cats program in 2005, we have never had a reported case of a person contracting toxoplasmosis from an outdoor cat.

We have a dog. Is that a problem for the cats?

No. If your dog is left alone in the yard frequently where they can sniff around the acclimation crates, they could be a deterrent to the cats. We recommend keeping dogs away from the cats while they are in acclimation crates. Once the cats are released, they will be active after dusk when your dog is likely inside the house. Tree House has placed cats successfully with many dog owners.



We have a high fence. Is that a problem?

No. Cats can climb about any type of fence, but we recommend making it easy for them by installing a pet door in tall fences.

Will the cats hunt if they fill up on cat food?

Contrary to popular belief, well-fed cats are actually **better** hunters than cats who rely on hunting to survive. Well-fed cats will hunt for sport and are prolific, whereas cats without a regular food supply will conserve energy and only hunt what they need for food.

Will they kill birds?

Cats can kill an occasional bird, but it is rare. Cats are *opportunistic hunters*, meaning they go after the easiest prey first, which is usually land-based critters. They also tend to be quite lazy! Cats are essentially rodent specialists. Birds they do kill are typically the sickly or injured ones that won't make it to the next breeding cycle anyway.

How will they survive the winter?

Outdoor cats are amazingly resilient to cold temperatures. They grow a very thick coat in the winter. Insulated shelters stuffed with straw are generally sufficient to keep them warm and prevent frost-bitten ears. However, outdoor heating pads are an excellent addition for any colony. Cats love them! If you don't have an electrical hook-up, microwavable Snuggle Safe Disks provide warmth up to 10 hours.

What if we still have rats after we get the cats?

That's very unlikely. Tree House's CAW program is nearly 100% effective in getting rid of rats. The key is creating an environment that the cats like, so they do not leave the area.

How long will the cats live?

The lifespan of a feral cat is generally less than that of a house cat. However, Tree House has had colony caretakers with outdoor cats more than fifteen years old. Adopting a feral cat colony is a long-term commitment.

Can we feed them leftovers?



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Cat food is nutritionally balanced for cats and is all they really need. Supplementing with meat scraps is ok, as long as all bones are removed. Chicken bones can splinter and easily become lodged in a cat's throat. Onions, garlic, green onions and chives are all poisonous for cats.

Should we give them milk?

No! Cats, even kittens, are generally lactose intolerant to cow's milk. It can cause digestive problems, diarrhea and dehydration. Fresh water is all they need.

Will the cats try to get out of the acclimation crates when I go to feed them?

It is very unlikely. When the cats hear you coming, they usually go into or behind the shelters.

What should I do if a cat escapes from the acclimation crate?

You should notify Tree House immediately and borrow a humane trap from our front desk. Place the trap next to the place where the cat escaped, line it with newspaper, tape the paper down, bait it with tuna and place a cover over it. Keep checking the trap often. When cats escape, they don't go far. If you can't get a trap right away, place food outside for the cat.

What should we do if they disappear after we let them out?

It's very normal following acclimation for cats to disappear for several days. We had one colony disappear for two weeks before returning. Keep feeding on the same schedule and don't change their environment or routine too much. We recommend using a hunter's trail camera or a drop cam to monitor the colony, so you can see exactly who is coming and going, especially at night.

Will they become friendlier over time?

Cats will sometimes warm up to their caretakers. They may watch you at a "safe" distance while you are placing food out for them. We've had some colony cats even allow touching after some time.

Will Tree House take a cat back if they becomes very friendly?

Yes. In the unlikely event that a cat becomes extremely friendly **not only to you**, but also to strangers, you can make an admissions request for the cat to go into Tree House's adoption program.

I've heard that the smell of the cats will deter rodents. How does that work?



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True. The pheromones from the cat will start to deter rodents even when the cats are in the acclimation crates. If you have rodent holes in your yard, you can scoop the cat litter and throw it down the holes to encourage rats to evacuate. Remove the cat feces first when doing this.

Will the cats cross major streets?

Yes, sometimes. Cats are more active after dusk and they are most likely to cross major streets in the wee hours of the morning when traffic is light. However, cats can cross streets at any time. To deter them from crossing streets, create a quiet environment with lots of hiding places, and if possible, green spaces.

What do I do if the cat becomes injured or sick?

Upper respiratory infections, conjunctivitis (eye infections) and fleas are common in outdoor cats. Brewer's yeast or **food grade** diatomaceous earth in food can help to keep the fleas at bay. If you notice excessive discharge coming from the nose or eyes, or if a cat is limping or walking on only three legs, trap the cat and get them to a local vet. Tree House can provide a list of vets who see feral cats in traps.

What should I do if one of the cats stops eating?

If this happens during the acclimation phase, contact Tree House. If this happens post-acclimation, trap the cat and get it to a local vet. The vet may be able to give the cat an injectable appetite stimulant.

What do I do if a new cat joins the colony?

Trap the cat immediately and get them to a spay/neuter clinic, and then re-release the cat. The clinic will always scan for a microchip, so if you suspect the cat is friendly, you may be able to identify the owner. Tree House has some public surgery slots available each week for registered Colony Caretakers which can be scheduled through our front desk. Our TNR package is \$30 for the sterilization surgery, flea treatment, microchipping, vaccinations (rabies & FVRCP) and ear-tipping.

What do I do if another animal such as a raccoon or possum starts eating the cat food?

Usually these types of animals come out late at night. Place the cats on a strict feeding schedule and remove any food before you go to bed. If other wildlife continues to be a nuisance, you can call a trapping service to remove them, but know that they will charge you and will likely euthanize anything they catch.



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Trapping wildlife (other than feral cats) is unlawful without a license, so we do not recommend relocating animals yourself. There are also platforms you can buy or build, which only cats can access. Get in touch with Tree House for more information

What should I do if I find kittens?

If the kittens are tiny (4 weeks or under), the first thing you should do is determine if there is a mama. Leave the kittens exactly where you found them and observe from a distance, such as from inside the house or in your car. Mama may not come back to them if she sees you. If a mama cat does come back within several hours, leave the kittens with her until they are weaned (5-6 weeks). Contact Tree House about getting the kittens and admissions appointment for our adoption program. If mama does not come back after 4 hours, give Tree House a call for further instructions.

What should I do if my cats don't get along?

Tree House generally places cats that know each other and get along well. However, the process of acclimating in crates can be stressful for cats. If you hear cats fighting during the acclimation phase, call Tree House immediately and we will separate the cats. Outdoor male cats fight over territory and females when they are intact. Since your cats will all be neutered or spayed, fighting post-acclimation is very unlikely, however, contact Tree House if you have a persistent issue.

What if someone harms my cats or threatens to harm them?

Per the 2007 *Managed Care of Feral Cats Ordinance* it is against the law to harm feral cats. We recommend communicating with your neighbors to let them know ahead of time that you have cats, and that they are spayed/neutered, vaccinated and fed regularly. The ordinance also stipulates that you will address any nuisance issues that arise. Undesired elimination is the most common complaint, which is why Tree House encourages people to continue to use a

litter box post acclimation. If someone is harming your cats, you should set up a camera to record any undesired activity. Police are unlikely to intervene without evidence. If you find a dead cat that you believe has been poisoned or otherwise harmed by someone, do not place the body in the freezer. You can ask a local vet to perform a necropsy on the cat to potentially identify cause of death, but only if the body is not frozen or decomposed. If you suspect someone is harming or



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threatening your cats, reach out to Tree House for additional information on what to do.

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