



**FRIENDS  
OF STRAYS  
ANIMAL SHELTER**

# Seven Ways to Help Your Community Cats Thrive

## 1. Establish A Routine

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Regular mealtimes give cats a better chance for a full meal than if food is placed randomly throughout the day. Leaving food out can attract pests or wildlife and is not allowed by Pinellas County Animal Services. Pinellas County's [ordinance says](#) food should only be placed for 3 hours total within a 24-hour day. Teaching cats a schedule means you'll see them regularly to watch for signs of concern like illness or injury and routine is often critical to successful trapping.

## 2. Provide Appropriate Food in Clean Dishes

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According to the [county ordinance](#) any caregiver to community cats must provide proper nutrition. Leftovers and table scraps are often inappropriate for cats and won't meet their nutrition needs. No matter your budget, a cat food is considered appropriate if it bears the "complete and balanced." This food will contain all the essential nutrients cats need.

The [ordinance also requires](#) that food be placed in clean dishes. If food is scattered or laid directly on the ground, there are remnants left behind to attract pests and wildlife. Dirt, grass, and cement can harbor a multitude of germs and microorganisms that can infect cats such as giardia, coccidia, and intestinal worms. Attracting wildlife further increases the risk of spreading illnesses like these.

## 3. Provide Fresh Water, Always

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It is essential that fresh, clean water is always available! A dish of stagnant water is a breeding ground for bacteria, protozoa, algae, and insect larvae. It's best to replace water daily and clean bowls often. This will ensure compliance with the [county ordinance](#) and help your kitties stay healthy and hydrated.

## 4. Trap-Neuter-Vaccinate-Return!

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Now that you are routinely feeding community cats, it is time to have them [neutered](#) and vaccinated! Vaccines protect cats from several transmissible illnesses, including rabies and distemper, and building herd immunity protects the entire community. Simply being spayed or neutered confers protections, too, by dramatic reduction of fighting and mating. Less fighting means fewer wounds or injuries to become infected, reduced exposure to [FIV and FeLV](#). Altered cats also roam less, which reduces exposure to a variety of dangers. Community cats often demonstrate improved health after being spayed or neutered simply by conserving the metabolic energy ordinarily used to maintain fertility. *Don't wait! A colony of unaltered cats can reproduce exponentially and quickly get out of hand!* Visit [friendsofstrays.org](http://friendsofstrays.org) to explore resources, and don't forget that keeping a colony stable requires maintenance. Any newcomers need to be neutered and vaccinated, too.

Friends of Strays has two free programs that you can utilize if you live in Pinellas County! If you are caring for just a few cats, you can try to trap them yourself through the [Pinellas Cats Alive!](#)

program. If you have a colony of cats and want help trapping them, you can use our [MEOW Now!](#) program.

## 5. Treat for Fleas

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Fleas are a terrible nuisance to community cats but also to you and other animals. Bites can become inflamed and irritated, causing open sores and hair loss in cats. Serious infestation can lead to anemia from blood loss. Fleas can also transmit infection. Flea dirt (poop) in the cat's fur may carry "[cat scratch fever,](#)" caused by a bacteria which can lead to serious illness if it infects a break in the skin like a cut or a scratch.

There are numerous products to combat fleas. Topical treatments can be used for cats that you can touch or handle. Some will require a prescription from a vet, such as Revolution or Bravecto. These popular choices include an active ingredient that also clears mites, which can cause ear infections and mange. Always make certain that whatever product you choose specifically states that it is safe for cats, because some are not.

Oral options that can be added to food are often available over the counter, but do come with some challenges. These tend to be less effective and are not long-lasting. With several cats, you'll still need to control which cat eats the medicine and ensure they consume a full dose but no more.

If none of these options is sufficient in your battle against fleas, you may want to seek an environmental option to treat your yard or where the cats spend time. One example is [diatomaceous earth \(food grade\)](#), a powder which kills insects by contact, yet is non-toxic and safe enough to apply directly to a pet's coat. Avoid producing too much airborne dust when applying the powder - it can be an irritant when inhaled.

## 6. De-Worm

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Intestinal worms are prevalent among community cats in Florida. These are typically classified as roundworms, hookworms or tapeworms. Yuck! Worms and parasites will cause an animal to suffer from malnutrition - even starvation - and a weakened immune system. Some can be passed via pregnancy and nursing. Hookworms consume a cat's blood and that an uncontrolled infestation can kill by blood loss, tissue damage, and even organ failure.

There are a variety of different treatments available for intestinal worms; some will only treat a single type of parasite, some will treat for several. Many are available over the counter such as Strongid, Nemex, and Drontal.

[Drontal](#) is a tablet which can usually be purchased at local feed stores, is easy to measure dosage at one pill per cat, can be added to food, and treats tapeworms, in addition to roundworms and hookworms. Because a cat gets tapeworms after ingesting fleas while grooming, controlling fleas should also control recurrence of tapeworms.

## 7. Have a Plan for Illness or Injury

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A community cat caregiver is responsible for providing humane care. By [county ordinance](#), this specifically means that a cat should never be allowed to suffer. Failure to provide care for illness or injury can be considered neglect. It's important to consider a few things before problems arise. How will you contain the cat - will you need a trap? Are you prepared to take the cat to a

vet or contain the cat for a period of recovery? In an emergency, would you surrender the cat to a shelter so they can choose the best course of action?

If you plan to seek vet attention, it's a good idea to find out which is willing to see a feral cat, how difficult it will be for them to see a cat on short notice, and what their rates are. If you anticipate challenges, you'll want to have an idea of where you may find support or resources. Friends of Strays does not have a full-service or emergency vet clinic. If you're faced with an emergency, we advise contacting an emergency vet or Pinellas County Animal Services. You can also find a list of vet clinics that will see a community cat [on our website](#).

**For more information about Pinellas County's ordinance pertaining to community cats, refer to [section 14-36 and 14-37](#).**