

## Feral Cat Colonies and Summer Challenges

**Becky Robinson, founder of Alley Cat Allies, discusses fighting bugs and other challenges during the warm-weather months.**

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**Q:** I'm a feral cat colony caregiver facing an uphill battle against bugs during the summer months. Please help!

**A:** Warmer weather means special considerations for feral cat colony care. Here are some tips to keep your feline friends cool and eating right.

### FOOD TIPS

When feeding feral cats in the summer, bugs can certainly pose a problem. Make sure you continue to follow the 30-minute "rule" for removing uneaten food. (Some cats may be slow to arrive at their meal so you may want to wait 45 or 60 minutes.) Also, maintain clean and neat feeding locations, and keep the food dishes in one place to facilitate cleanup by using a feeding station. Find Alley Cat Allies' online plans for building one.

In addition to raising the food off the ground, other ways to deter insects from the cats' food include: Surrounding the food bowl with a ring of baking soda. Placing a tray or flowerpot tray with about half an inch to an inch of water in it on the feeding station platform and then placing the food bowl on the tray. Cutting back, or completely cutting out, the amount of wet food that you feed, because dry food tends to attract fewer bugs. Be sure to add more dry food to compensate. Elevating feeding stations slightly off the ground and surrounding them with a line of food-grade diatomaceous earth without chemical additives (available from some natural food stores and environmentally conscious pet-care supply companies). The diatom dust should be reapplied after rainstorms. Note that diatomaceous earth sold for swimming pool filters is not safe to use for this purpose. Purchasing Alley Cat Allies' recommended ant-proof bowls.

Even if you're not having bug problems with wet food, you could be having another issue — wet food can dry out fast in the heat. To counteract this, add water. It has the added benefit of providing extra hydration for the cats.

### WATER

This is a time of year to take the cats' water needs seriously. Consider putting out extra sources of water during the summer months, and placing them in areas that will remain cool throughout the day. Water evaporates quickly in the summer heat, so keep bowls out of the sun. A feeding station (see above) can help provide shade. A bowl with less surface area will reduce the evaporation rate as well, so use a bowl that is narrow, but deep.

### TRAPPING CONDITIONS

If you are performing trap-neuter-return during the summer months, make sure to take into account the extreme heat and how it affects the cats' safety. It is possible for a cat to die from heat stroke when confined in a trap for too long. A simple guideline: if it is too hot outside for you, it is too hot for the cats. Make sure the cats don't remain in their traps for long by making your neuter appointments for directly after your trapping.

Also, don't place traps on surfaces that can get extremely warm from the sun, such as asphalt. The metal trap can absorb the asphalt's heat and burn the cats' paws.

Let us know about your summer weather feral cat colony tips by commenting below.