

Outdoor Cats Are Making My Indoor Cats Misbehave

CatChannel behavior expert Marilyn Krieger, CCBC, offers advice on dealing with feral cats while helping inside cats behave.

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Q: I have two indoor cats, a 3-year-old neutered male and a 2-year-old spayed female.

We have experienced some problems with urine on furniture and on the carpets. Both cats were checked by our vet and have no medical problems. We added another litterbox at the opposite end of the house from the first litterbox. We have repeatedly sprayed (vinegar, hydrogen peroxide and over-the-counter animal odor control, Fabreze, etc.) and have steam-cleaned all areas we could find. It hasn't helped.

Our subdivision has a small population of outside house and feral cats that roam around at night. Thinking that our male cat has issues with other cats that come up to our house, I recently trapped a feral cat on our front porch that was hanging around. I do not want to trap all the cats that come through our yard and hope I have done the right thing in trapping this one cat. The problem is still persisting. What should I do?

A: Based on your e-mail, it appears that the feral and neighborhood cats are triggering your cats to spray and urinate outside of the litterbox. To change your inside cats' behavior, you will have to keep the visitors out of your yard and off of the porch. The feral cats should be trapped, neutered and then released. You may have to ask feral cat groups or possibly no-kill shelters for help. Talk to the neighbors, enlisting their help for both catching the ferals and managing their own cats. It is possible that their cats are part of the problem; perhaps the neighbors will be agreeable to keeping their cats inside, instead of letting them roam free 24/7. Deterrents that do not harm cats can also keep them out of the yard and off the porch.

In addition to managing the outside-cat situation, there are some inside activities that will help change your cats' behaviors. First, make it impossible for your inside cats to see the outsiders by covering windows that afford a view of the neighborhood cats. Depending on where the outside cats hang out, you may have to block the view by covering a few windows or the lower 3 feet of windows and sliding glass doors. Fabric or butcher paper work well and is easy to apply and remove. After the outside situation is resolved, the fabric or butcher paper can gradually be removed.

It is also necessary to thoroughly clean up the targeted areas using an excellent enzyme cleaner. Some enzyme cleaners are more effective than others. The one I highly recommend is Anti-Icky-Poo. In addition to cleaning the soiled areas inside your house, it is important to identify and then thoroughly clean the targeted areas on the outside of your house. Ferals and other neighborhood cats will commonly leave their calling cards, spraying walls, doors and windows. These calling cards are sufficient to trigger inside cats to respond with their own announcements.