

She Thinks She's My Cat

Okay, it's probably my fault for feeding and providing some shelter for these critters, but they have to come from somewhere, and don't they have a home to go to? This all started when I moved to Kansas, and for three years the house was invaded by two to five mice per year. Setting traps to remove these things is easy but a bit messy and disgusting, so the thought of getting a cat came to mind. In rethinking the prospect, it was very clear that I didn't want to take care of one, nor did I want the burden of finding a caretaker whenever an out of town event arrived.

My neighbors might think it strange, but one of my hobbies is to plant edible things around the house. Where most folks put a shade tree and shrubs, my house has fruit trees and garden goodies like rhubarb, grapes, tomatoes, melons, lettuce, and turnips. While out digging or tending to the gardens, the neighborhood cats would often stroll by and utilize my fresh dug soils for their routines. So one day the idea came together that if a food bowl was set on my porch, these critters might fend off the undesirable wildlife.

Now in the fourth year of this experiment, there has not been a mouse in my house since the plan was started. That is a remarkable advantage, and probably worth maintaining, but there are a few disadvantages also. There is about \$15 for 20-lbs a month outlay for the food, and for some reason, these critters sleep during the day leaving the food bowl unattended, so the birds come in and "paint" my porch if the food is available. There are also ants and other bugs that will get into the supply during warm weather, if it is not surrounded with water. A skunk and an opossum visited once, and a raccoon was seen three times, but these were rarities. These things are manageable with good timing and about as much work as having my own cat, but my vacations and other trips are unhindered and these visitors seem to be better fed than when the project started.

My porch has an antique firewood heater setting out that the cats like to sleep under, and the space is narrow enough that you can't tell if it is occupied without some extra effort, and my small utility trailer has grass growing around it creating a habitat underneath. So when the lawn is mowed, some furry things come darting out of these hideaways with amazing speed. On occasions when I set out and read a newspaper or such, some of these fur balls are pettable, some you can pick up, and some will hiss at me and keep a distance. None of these creatures are permanent, but they do act like this is their private hangout and they are only tolerating me as a visitor. When I do run off for a few days without feeding them, they respond with these strange looks and sounds that remind me of my parents reactions when I stayed out too late.

It really is difficult to tell where these cats came from or which home has their true owner, for several neighbors set food on their porches, and all the critters seem to ramble about like kids expecting a neighborhood treat. They know where to go, and some will come running from over the hill or around the corners when they hear my screen door open. Are these my cats, or am I their keeper? It's like feeding birds, they like a handout and learn routines, but it seems that they live free to their own choices. Let me know if you need a friendly cat, I also have a neighbor's dog that needs a home far away.