

There Are Kittens in My Yard!

The first step upon discovering kittens in your yard is to vacate the area unless they are in immediate danger. Keep tabs on the situation from a distance, inside the house so the mom cat will feel comfortable returning to them.

The second, assuming you have not been feeding the mother cat, is to check with your neighbors to see if they have been feeding cats.

The third, if you are able, is to offer the mom cat a safe place to move her kittens to. A shelter stuffed with straw, even a cardboard box (stuffed with straw) with a hole cut in the side just big enough for her to come and go might encourage her to move her kittens out of bushes, a pile of firewood, etc.

If the kittens are in danger – roaming dogs, coyotes seen daily, lawn care workers coming to re-do the back yard, your siding is being replaced, mom cat has not been seen for two days, then and only then, should the kittens be removed. The mom cat can usually do an excellent job of caring for the kittens and there is time to contact Feral Fixers and make a plan of how to move forward. The best food is the mom's milk, the best emotional support is mom's care – human care is a poor second choice at best.

Pregnant females will give birth in locations that they think are safe but inexperienced first-timers may have to make a hasty selection. That's how kittens end up in bushes, flower beds, window wells.

Moms move their litters several times while caring for them, situations change, kittens grow, weather changes. The important thing is to keep an eye on them and be aware of where the kittens are being moved to. The rule of thumb has always been that kittens need to eat every two hours. In truth, while the kittens are with the mom they might nurse continuously, but the mom can be gone for long stretches of time – sometimes eight hours plus. If she is out searching for food, searching for a new location, that can take time. While the mom is gone, kittens often go into a semi-comatose state, limiting energy expenditure until she returns. So, unless the kittens are screaming with hunger, are cold, have been left for more than 24 hours, it is best not to intervene.

In the worst-case scenario, you have nabbed the kittens and are now wondering what to do: get them warm – heating pad, hot water bottles (fill a drinking bottle with hot water, wrap in a towel, put wrapped bottle in box/carrier with them). Do not attempt to feed them until they are completely warmed up. Feeding before warmed up could be fatal, cannot emphasize that enough. The best food is KMR (kitten milk replacement formula) which can be purchased at pet stores. Never give cow's milk, it does not have the correct enzymes and nutrients that the kittens need and will do more harm than good. Never give baby cereal (old wives' tale). If you cannot get to a pet store, the Kitten Rescue Handbook (<http://www.kittenrescue.org/index.php/cat-care/kitten-care-handbook/>) has a

huge amount of information for the correct way to care for the kittens, including recipes for formula from ingredients you may have on hand.

Pregnant females need extra food but that need doubles and triples once they start nursing kittens. If you know a cat is taking care of kittens, be sure to have plenty of fresh water available, too.

If the kittens are moved out of your yard, but you are still feeding, mom will probably still bring them to the food station when they are approximately 5 weeks old. That is the optimum time for bringing them in for taming and ultimate adoption. The mom cat has done all of the hard work, nursing, caring, and has brought them to the point where they can eat solid food. Five weeks is the time when they will imprint on humans most easily. The effort to tame increases tremendously the older they get, using up resources of rescue organizations, delaying adoptions, increasing the chance that you will not be able to trap one or more and those kittens will go on to give birth to more and the cycle will continue.

There are a limited number of adoptive homes, limited space in rescues. The most important thing you could do is practice TNR (Trap/Neuter/Return) on the cats in your neighborhood and prevent the next litter of kittens in your yard!

While Feral Fixers has been at work in DuPage County, neutering over 13,000 cats in 14 years, the numbers of cats euthanized at DuPage County Animal Care & Control has been steadily decreasing. The practice of TNR is working and the numbers are proof.

Feral Fixers can help feral cat caretakers take care of spaying/neutering, instruct on care of kittens, facilitate the placement of kittens in shelters, assist in adoptions, but our resources are limited and can only take in a small number of kittens ourselves. Therefore, prevention thru TNR is the key to resolving cat overpopulation in DuPage County.

When you see stray and feral cats in your yard, your neighborhood, contact Feral Fixers so that the numbers of cats do not increase and you do not end up with Kittens In Your Yard!

Feral Fixers
630-881-3977
gotferalcats@feralfixers.org