

CAT POOP DETERRENTS AND TOXOPLASMOSIS

Hello Gardeners,

Here is a reminder about how to make your garden plot inaccessible to cats and other animals.

In the spring, garden plots are open and full of loose soil, with few (or no) tiny seedlings. To a cat your plot looks like a litter box.

Here are deterrents proposed by our gardeners, based on experience. **Start now!** Implement techniques before your plants grow too large.

- *Keep your soil as wet and heavy as possible.*
- *Cover seeds, small plants with wire baskets (wire drawers or dish drainers).*
- *Strew large, rough, jagged tree branches (not small flat sticks) over the plot.*
- *Deer netting can be effective. Attach (nail, staple) netting to the wood frame on one side of your plot and roll out to cover your plot when you are away. Roll back to work your plot.*
- *Cut chicken wire to plot-size and push down into the soil, allowing plants to grow through the wire.*
- *Once plants come up, scatter pebbles and small pea gravel around plants.*
- *Stick plastic forks (tine-side up) and bamboo sticks into dirt, These are uncomfortable to cat paws.*
- *Moth balls (poisonous) deter cats and can be hung in permeable bags on and around grown plants and shrubs. Protect the soil and yourselves.*
- *Make a sand pile, either by digging a shallow area in the ground or using a child's plastic swimming pool and punching holes in the bottom for drainage. Fill with cheap construction sand (50# bags at hardware stores). The urine washes through, but feces needs to be scooped.*
- *Citronella plants deter mosquitos and may also deter cats.*

What didn't work: Many websites recommend coffee grinds, pungent oils (e.g., evergreen, tea tree), orange and lemon peels, cayenne pepper, etc. But we found that rain lessens their potency over time.

Please share your own experiences at the end of the season. Thank you!

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TOXOPLASMOSIS:

The good news is that it is hard to get toxoplasmosis from a cat.

The bad news is that it is easy to get it from your own kitchen cutting board.

Undercooked meat and fish and unwashed fruits and vegetables are the main culprits. The CDC calls toxoplasmosis a “food-borne disease” and states that cats, when kept indoors and fed commercial food, do not pose a risk to pregnant women or immune-deficient people.

See articles from the Center for Disease Control (CDC):

https://www.cdc.gov/parasites/toxoplasmosis/gen_info/faqs.html

Cats are “hosts” of the parasite, meaning they are intermediaries, spreading the toxoplasmosis parasite via their feces. But this occurs only once, for a 3-week period in a cat’s life, after the first time they eat raw meat containing the parasite.

If they continue to hunt, eat raw prey containing the parasite, their feces will never again contain the parasite.

In order for humans to get toxoplasmosis from a cat, they have to ingest cat feces (i.e., eat, breathe in dry particles, touch their mucous membranes after handling feces) during this one 3-week period in a cat’s lifetime.

Wear gloves when handling feces. Do not touch your face (mucous membranes). Wash your hands and garden produce well.

Our garden cats are fed commercial food which has been cooked. They no longer bother to hunt, except for sport. Even so, cats which hunt for food or sport contract and shed the toxoplasma parasite early in life as kittens.

The food risk: Humans can get toxoplasmosis directly from undercooked meat and fish and unwashed fruits and vegetables. We humans are not “hosts”. We are end-carriers. The parasites stays within us and cannot be spread to others via feces. However, it can be passed to others through blood transfusions and from a pregnant mom to the unborn child.