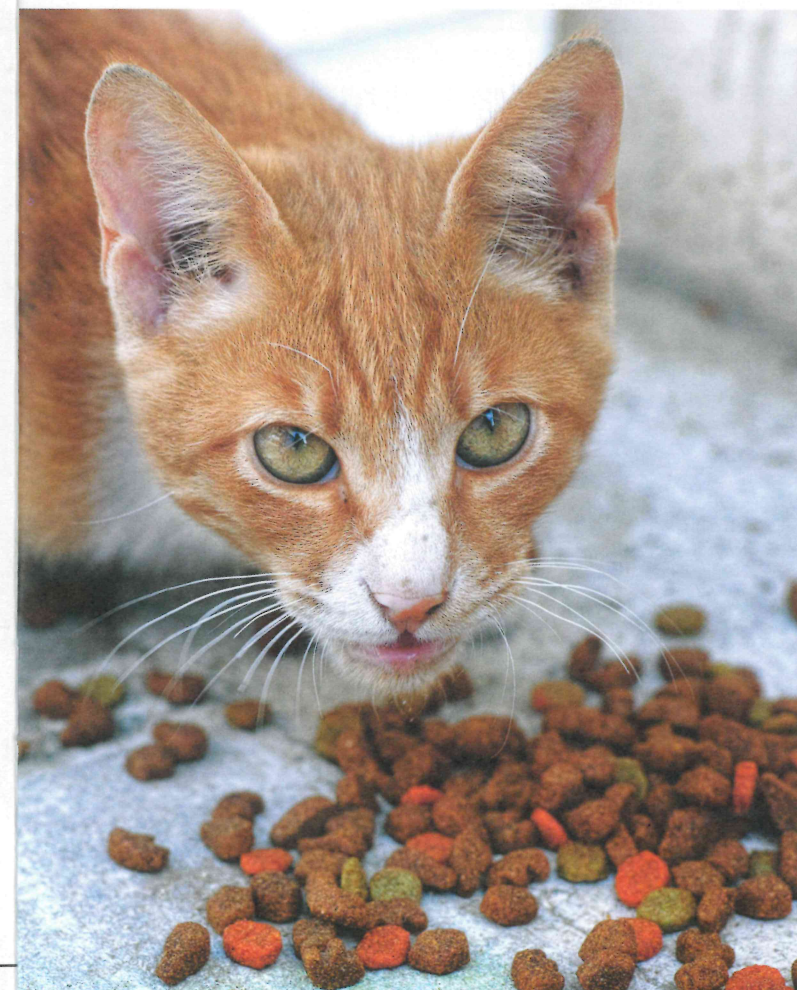
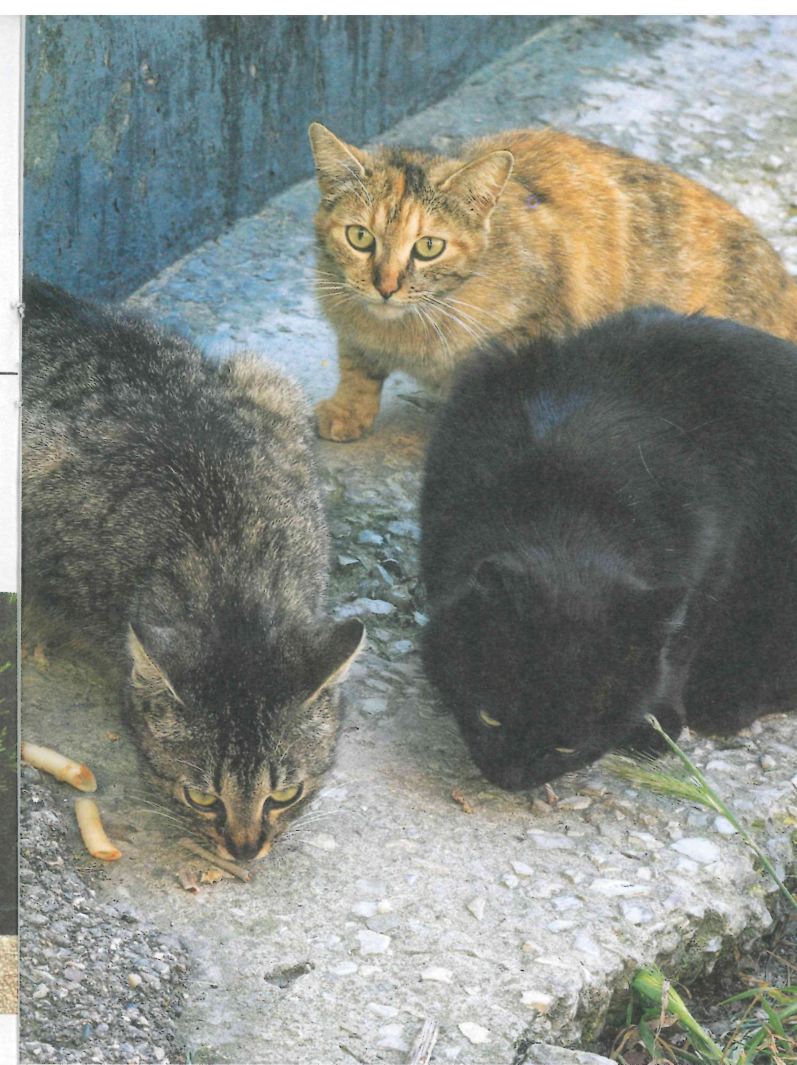


Myths vs. Facts

Myth: There's no harm in feeding stray cats.

Fact: THOU SHALT NOT feed stray cats willy-nilly!



The answer seems obvious. A cat you've never seen before starts hanging out on your patio. He must be lost. He has nowhere to go. He seems friendly. He must be hungry. Of course I should feed him.

Wanting to ensure that an animal isn't suffering is laudable. But whether you should start feeding a mystery cat should be carefully considered before you set out that first bowl of Friskees Buffet with Gravy. First consideration: If you feed this cat today, the likelihood that he will become a repeat customer is high.

Once you start, the cat may start to depend on you and fail to find food elsewhere. Is this a commitment you want to undertake? Have you already made sure that he doesn't belong to someone who lives nearby? Maybe somebody is looking for him and worrying, or maybe they don't know how far

he is wandering. Maybe the cat is lost and someone is waiting by the phone for news. If you can handle the cat, take him to a shelter or vet clinic where he can be scanned for a microchip. This will help you decide the best course of action.

If you weigh all the factors and decide to feed the cat, here are some guidelines:

If you leave food and water out for a long period, you may attract more cats. If these cats are not spayed or neutered, you could end up perpetuating the very problem you're trying to solve. In addition, food left out will likely attract wildlife.

In fact, you may inadvertently attract coyotes who might be looking for a snack of their own. One way to limit these problems is to set out one serving at a time for the visiting cat. If you must leave food and

water out during the day, make sure and bring it in when the sun goes down.

If you've been unable to find an owner, feeding a cat is humane, but it comes with additional responsibilities. If you don't intend to make the cat a house-pet, and you don't get the cat spayed/neutered and vaccinated, you may be exacerbating a community-wide problem and putting other cats at risk.

If the cat isn't friendly enough for you to handle, seek information and assistance on how to humanely trap the cat and get him sterilized, chipped, and vaccinated. You can call the humane society for this kind of assistance.

Keep in mind that not all veterinarians are equipped to deal with feral or semi-feral cats. It's important to let the staff know in advance that the cat is feral or semi-feral so they can prepare to examine a cat that doesn't tolerate being handled.

If you're taking responsibility for feeding, you should also provide a form of shelter for severe weather.

If a cat that appears in your yard appears to be injured, sick, or flea infested, it is best to call animal control or the humane society for assistance.

Our mission here at CCHS is "to instill respect, kindness, and compassion for animals as community values." Indeed, we are here to help you be the best steward of cats, these majestic beings, whether they are indoor or outdoor, feral or somewhere in between.

By Mary Tiefenbrunn