

Pets Are Not Disposable Items

By Larry Caplan, Extension Horticulture Educator, Vanderburgh County, IN

For the Evansville Courier and Press, October 30, 2016

Last week, I had to put my cat, Chaos, to sleep. He'd been fighting lymphoma most of the summer, and his poor little body just gave out.

I rescued Chaos 13 years ago. I even wrote about the event in this column. How someone callously tossed him out of their car as they drove by. How I nearly tripped over a tiny ball of fur as I was inspecting a client's damaged tree. How I had to bottle-feed him for two weeks.

I'd always disliked cats; I was more of a dog person. But there was no way I could just let this defenseless kitten starve to death. I had originally scooped him up with thoughts of bringing him to the Humane Society for someone to adopt. By the time I realized that they couldn't take "wild" cats, especially that young, the little rascal had bonded to me. Literally. I hadn't realized kitten claws were that sharp.

To quote from my August 31, 2003 column:

"It bothered me to think that this kitten had been basically left to starve...It had no shelter, and no parent to teach it to find food...Even if, by some miracle, it had survived on its own, it would have been a feral cat. To survive, it would have to attack song birds and small livestock (rabbits and poultry). Since it wouldn't get to a veterinarian, it would become a reservoir for human and wildlife diseases, including cat scratch fever, distemper, rabies, and various parasites. Since feral cats are territorial, it would have to fight to maintain a hunting ground; it would likely end up dead, but not before it injured or killed someone's domesticated cat or dog."

If you own a pet, you owe it to the animal, your neighbors, and the environment to properly care for it. Your pet should receive regular checkups and vaccinations from a veterinarian, to keep it and your family healthy. All pets should be spayed or neutered as early as possible. Over 70,000 kittens and puppies are born in the United States EVERY DAY; there can never be enough homes for all these pets. That means that large numbers of them will have to be put to sleep, or allowed to die in the wild, unloved and unwanted.

If you want to add a furry member to your family, please consider rescuing one from your local Humane Society, your county's animal control department, or from another

reputable local rescue group. And if you physically can't care for your pet anymore, please be responsible and surrender it to an organization that can find a home for it; don't treat it like a piece of trash and toss it away.

For more information on dealing with feral animal control, contact the Purdue Extension Service at (812) 435-5287. You can also get more information on adopting and caring for a pet by contacting the Vanderburgh Humane Society: <http://www.vhslifesaver.org/>, or at (812) 426-2563.