

# So you found a stray cat

Or so you think. It might be an owned pet, an abandoned pet, or a community cat.

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If you've found a cat outdoors or an unfamiliar cat has started hanging around, you might be inclined to help. But, studies have shown that cats have a better chance of being reunited with its people if they don't go to a shelter. So, if you find a mystery cat - or a cat finds you and you want to help, follow the steps below.

## LOOK FOR STATUS CLUES:

**Collar** - If the cat has a collar, you're likely dealing with a lost pet or a pet cat who lives nearby. If there's identification, try to contact the owner.

**Ear-Tip** - A community cat who has been spayed or neutered will have a tipped or notched ear. An ear-tipped cat in good body condition likely has caretakers in the neighborhood.

**Microchip** - If you can safely get the cat into a carrier or borrow a humane trap, take them to a veterinarian or animal shelter to be scanned for a microchip.

**Body Condition** - Does the cat appear in good body condition and only appear at your house sporadically? That's a good indication that the kitty is being fed elsewhere.

## EVALUATE THE LEVEL OF SOCIALIZATION

While there are no hard-and-fast rules, a cat who approaches you and is friendly toward humans is more likely to be a pet who is allowed outside or a lost or abandoned pet. A cat who is unsocialized (or feral) is more likely to be a community cat. That said, not all pet cats are trusting of strangers, and some community cats are friendly with people. So socialization alone won't tell you if a cat has an owner or caretaker.

## GET THE WORD OUT

Talk with neighbors and those who frequent your neighborhood. File a report with local animal shelters. Post flyers and notices on social media sites.

## NEXT STEPS

**Lost Pet** - If the cat is scared and eludes the owners' attempts to retrieve them, learn about trapping a lost cat.

**Free-Roaming Pet** - If the cat is an owned pet who is allowed to roam freely outside, share information about catios and tips for keeping cats happy indoors. If their pet isn't sterilized, you can provide information on local spay/neuter programs and the benefits of spay/neuter.

**Sterilized Community Cat** - If the cat is a sterilized community cat who is cared for by neighbors, you can offer support in a variety of ways, such as by donating cat food, helping to build a winter shelter or feeding when the caretakers are out of town.

**Unsterilized Community Cat** - You may discover that your mystery cat is being fed by one or more households but hasn't been fixed or vaccinated. By helping to fill that gap, you can provide a longer, healthier life for the cat.

## STILL A MYSTERY?

If the cat is socialized, ask your local shelters and rescue groups for help getting the cat vetted and placed in an adoption program. If your local shelters and rescue groups are overwhelmed, consider fostering the cat until you can find an adopter. An unsocialized cat is unlikely to adjust to being an indoor pet, but you can greatly improve the cat's chances of a long, healthy life by practicing TNR.

