

THE HIGH DESERT ORGANIC GARDENER FEBRUARY 2012

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Cats, those wonderfully useful farm animals, predators that help out dramatically on the farm, the organic farmer's and gardener's buddy, high on the relationship list, is difficult to utilize for many people, especially those who are new to growing, especially organically. I think the changing relationship between people and cats over a long period of time has created a relationship that does not work on the organic growing level. The partnership is different.

Cats can be members of the family to the point that they are almost like children. Such closeness is very rewarding for both cat and human. For older people such relationships can be especially rewarding. And of course for children it can be traumatic when a family feline dies. When the relationship is of a family member, then it is difficult to allow such a cat wilderness freedom as many dangers exist for cats as prey, especially that clever coyote; probably the most common predator of cats around our area. Of course the mountains harbor even more dangers but I'll bet the coyote is still the main predator.

Under such conditions the human tendency is to protect the family member from any and all dangers and try to prolong the cat's life for as long as possible. When such an attachment exists it is difficult not to look at all cats the same way. Yet this conflict can make life miserable for the home organic gardener. The killers of pests for the organic gardener are non-toxic, self motivated predators and cats are definitely a winner.

What does a good feline huntress hunt? What a list. Mice, rats, lizards, snakes, grasshoppers (which they eat), gophers, birds, ground squirrels, and even rabbits close to the size of the cat, as evidenced by the rabbit being eaten by Boots, the kitten. The hunter making the catch was probably Dumpty, Queen of the Pride, pictured on the tree limb above, but it could have been Shadow.

That is a lot of critter control by cats and I have seen enough of these critters in gardens to stop people dead in their tracks. The time it would take for a human to do the critter control non-toxic would take much, much time. Cats are efficient and effective and they do it all



on their own. Cats have a purpose in life and if we allow them to exert their natural purpose then we can benefit greatly but we have to allow them to live according to their wild nature and purpose. In doing so they return to nature and are themselves subject to the forces of nature and thus hunted and eaten also.

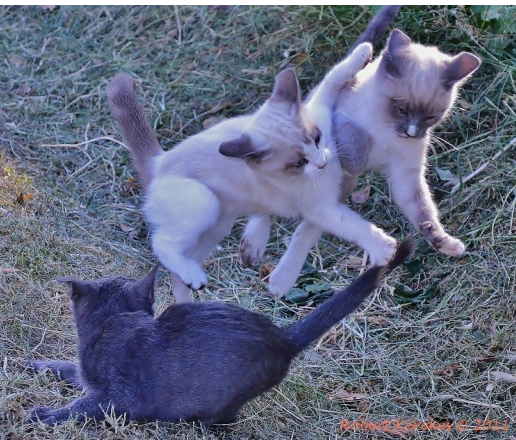
That is Dumpty, to the right, nursing some pretty big kittens. The mother of some of the kittens, Ex, died suddenly. That is my second, sudden, mysterious death. I fear poison used for gophers but have no way of knowing.



Right now I have two adult females and five adolescent kittens. All are females, except for one male. I like to have a minimum of three cats, but, prefer to have five with one male. I expect to lose two to three cats yearly. Dumpty and Shadow, if they make it, will be three this spring. They have reached an age of wisdom and their survival skills will help them carry on.

There are a few problems, like anything else. I have to cover small seed beds with bird netting to protect the beds from cats digging. People have complained to me, as another reason not to have cats, because of the males spraying. My adult females spray, naturally marking their territory, and so do males that come courting, but I haven't had any real problems with that.

They get underfoot, especially at feeding time. They follow me around and I usually have one that is with me like a dog. Right now that is the male adolescent, Agradable. Every-



where I go he goes. When I'm working in the garden they want to know what I am doing. But overall they are wonderful to have around and to have kittens every year is marvelous. We try very much to start kittens off with as much human contact as possible in order to make them human friendly as we must find homes for many cats and we always do. Some cats are naturally friendlier than others.

To the left are frolicking kittens from a few months ago. Grey to the left bottom, center is Madonna, and upper right is Agradable. Check out my web site for plants and more.

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