

HOW TO TRAP CATS

Find and coordinate with any other caregivers who are feeding about your plans to trap. If you are the primary caregiver, this is a good opportunity to educate the community and let them know you are caring for the cats. If there are other people feeding the cats, talk to them about Trap-Neuter-Return and try to coordinate efforts, particularly when it comes to feeding and withholding food, and assessing the colony before trapping.

Feed on a schedule. Establish a routine time and place for feeding the cats every day for at least two weeks prior to trapping. Also, get the cats used to eating in a 30-minute period. Food should not be left out all of the time. The cats will quickly adapt to the feeding time and will come at that time each day. **This is essential to making sure they all come to eat when you plan to trap.** Your trapping day will be most successful if the cats are used to seeing traps. You may want to begin feeding cats out of unset traps (open and secure door at top of trap with plastic or wire tie, or string) to gain their confidence. Remember to work with others who may be caring for the cats in order to coordinate feeding efforts.

Ensure that the feeding station is appropriately placed. Position the feeding station in an area that is free of human traffic and is inconspicuous. You will have greater success in manipulating their schedule, getting them to show up, and consequently trapping.

Assess the cats. While feeding, start a log of each cat and kitten you see. This will help you monitor the number of cats and their health, determine their approximate age, and help you determine the numbers of appointments and traps you will need. It will also help you identify if some cats are abandoned or lost—friendly to humans—and may be candidates for adoption into homes or if you will need to be prepared for trapping and fostering kittens. It is important that you get to know the colony, the number of cats, and their description to ensure that all of the cats have been trapped. This is also important for ongoing colony care so you will know if any cats are missing or if any new cats join the colony that need to be neutered.

Schedule the Neuter appointments. Line up clinic or veterinary appointments **BEFORE YOU TRAP.** You don't want to successfully trap cats and then have nowhere to take them. Make appointments for the number of traps you have, though you may not catch a cat in every trap. Make sure the clinic or veterinarian is familiar with trapping and their policy if the reservation isn't fulfilled completely. Ask them what number of cats they can spay and neuter in a single day. Plan your trapping session so that the cats are transported to the veterinarian or clinic as soon as possible. Make appointments for the same or following day to keep cats' time in the traps at a minimum.

Determine the location where you will be holding the trapped cats, both before transporting to the clinic and afterwards during their surgery recovery. The indoor location should be dry, temperature-controlled, quiet, and away from dangers such as toxic fumes, other animals, or people. It is important to remember that cats are very vulnerable when in traps.

Although it is not necessary, you may want to consider securing help for the day-of, either through recruiting volunteers or asking a friend. Trapping by yourself, especially for your first time, can be overwhelming and exhausting. Having a companion is also a good safety precaution if you are trapping at night or in an unfamiliar area.

Practice setting traps ahead of time. If you have never set a trap, doing it near the trap site on the day-of is not the best place to learn. Be as comfortable as possible with your equipment, for your own peace of mind and the cats' safety.

Label the traps. Never leave your traps unattended where they are visible and accessible to others. Depending on your trapping site, it may be a good idea to create a sign stating "Spay and Neuter Program in Progress (Do Not Remove)" or "Humane Trapping in Progress" and attach a copy to each trap. Waterproof the sign by enclosing it in a plastic covering or bag.

Pay attention to the weather. Never trap in extreme temperatures, hot or cold. They are dangerous conditions for cats to be without food and water and exposed to the elements.

Withhold food. It may be necessary to withhold a meal or two from the cats you are preparing to trap, to ensure they are hungry enough to enter the traps. Fasting for 8-12 hours before surgery is required for anesthesia. Remember, you are doing what is best for the cats. Continue to provide water.

Prepare the traps. Prepare the traps away from the trap site to prevent unfamiliar noises and commotion that could frighten the cats away. Always test the trap to be sure it's working correctly. You can see demonstrations of setting traps on Alley Cat Allies website www.alleycat.org.

Line bottom of the trap and tag the trap. Place newspaper, folded lengthwise, inside the bottom of the trap to protect the cats' paws. If it is windy, secure the newspaper to the trap with tape, or cut a piece of cardboard. Should you open the rear door, be sure to relock it before trapping.

Bait the traps. Place bait—jack mackerel, sardines, or tuna (usually the ones in oil work best)—at the very back of the trap, so the cat will step on the trigger plate while attempting to reach the food. You may choose to put the food in a lid or container for this, but make sure it does not have sharp edges that could harm the cat once trapped. Drizzle some juice from the bait in a zigzag pattern along the trap floor toward the entrance. You should also place a tiny bit of food (½ teaspoon or less) just inside the entrance of the trap to encourage the cat to walk in. Do not use too much food at the entrance of the trap - the cat may be satisfied before making it to the trip plate.

Set the traps. Place a trap on the ground and make certain it is stable and will not rock or tip. Do not place the trap on a hillside or incline. Set the traps within your eye line so you can keep track of them without having to enter the area every time you want to check it. If you are using multiple traps, stagger them and have them facing different directions. Try to place the traps where they will attract a cat and be camouflaged, for example, near a bush. Move quietly and slowly so your movements will not frighten cats away. Set the traps and leave the area quietly. The cats are unlikely to enter the traps if you are standing nearby. You should not go back and check on the traps until about 30 minutes has passed from when you set them. To avoid trapping wild animals that can damage the trap(s), **DO NOT LEAVE TRAPS SET AND UNATTENDED AT NIGHT.**

Cover the traps. Leaving a cat uncovered in a trap will increase the cat's stress and could lead to injury if they thrash against the cage. Place a towel or sheet over just the back part of the trap – not the front – before you place it for trapping so you can easily cover the entire trap after the cat is caught. This could also encourage the cat to go inside the trap since it appears to be a covered safe place.

Keep track of the traps at all times. Traps should never be left unattended. Check the traps frequently from a distance. If you are trapping in a location where you had to drive, park your car and wait where you are far enough away to give the cats a sense of safety, but close enough so that you can see them.

Check for ear-tipping. Be prepared for the fact that you may trap cats that are already ear-tipped. If you do, it is sometimes best to hold that cat in the trap covered until the cats you are aiming for have been trapped.

Be Patient! Trapping a feral cat may take some time. Be patient. It may take the cat a few minutes to go into the trap so make sure the trap is sprung, and the cat securely trapped, before you approach.

After the cat has been trapped, cover the entire trap before moving it. Covering the traps will help to keep the cats calm. Move trapped cats away to a quiet, safe area to avoid scaring any remaining, un-trapped cats.

It is normal for cats to thrash around inside the trap. You may be tempted to release a thrashing cat because you fear that they will hurt themselves, but cats calm down once the trap is fully covered. Remember, you are doing this for their benefit. If they are released, they will continue to breed, and you will probably not be able to trap them again. Also, most injuries from traps are very minor, such as a bruised or bloody nose or a scratched paw.

You should never open the trap or try to touch a conscious or semi-conscious feral cat. Behave appropriately around trapped cats by being calm, quiet, and not touching them, even if they appear friendly under normal circumstances.

When an entire colony is being trapped from the same area, it does not make sense to take each cat from the location directly after the trap is sprung. This could disturb the area and scare the other cats away. Wait, then during a quiet moment when no other cats are investigating the set traps, or if the trapped cats are making noise and deterring other cats from approaching the traps, remove the full traps and put them in the holding vehicle. Re-bait any traps that have had the bait eaten but have not sprung.

Take the cats to a veterinarian or a spay/neuter clinic. You should have already made appointments for surgery before beginning to trap. Confirm that only sutures that do not need to be removed will be used.

If your appointments are not the same day as the trapping, keep the cats indoors in their covered traps and make sure they are in a dry, temperature-controlled environment, and away from dangers such as toxic fumes, other animals, or people. Your trapping should coincide with the clinic's ability to neuter right away – or the next morning, so the cats don't remain in their traps for long. (IMPORTANT: It is possible for a cat to die from hypothermia or heat stroke when confined in a trap outside. A simple guideline—if it is too hot or cold outside for you, then it is too hot or cold for the cats.)

Never move trapped cats in the trunk of a car or the open bed of a pickup truck—this is unsafe and it terrifies the cats. If traps must be stacked inside the vehicle, be sure to secure the traps with bungee cords or other restraints and place puppy pads or newspaper between the stacked traps. If an unsecured trap tips sideways or upside down, it can open and release the cat. If it seems precarious, it won't work. Don't take the risk.

TIPS FOR HARD-TO-TRAP CATS

Cats can become too fearful to go near or enter a trap, or trap-savvy—mastering the art of removing food without triggering the trap. Don't be discouraged. There are several unique but straightforward techniques to humanely trap hard-to-trap-cats.

Get the cats used to eating out of the trap. Over a period of mealtimes, place the food by the entrance of the unset trap, then inside, then to the rear. Feed in the same place and time as always. Monitor the traps while the cats eat to ensure traps are not stolen or a cat is not accidentally trapped. The cat will see other cats eating safely inside the trap and will likely try it as well.

Try using a larger size trap. Some cats may be more comfortable entering a larger trap.

Make the trap more enticing. Consider using the following treats as bait:

- Jarred meat baby food ("first foods" chicken or turkey)
- Catnip
- Other types of bait, depending on what you originally used: "people" tuna in oil, mackerel, sardines, cooked chicken

Use distraction techniques to help coax the cat onto the trigger plate. You may be able to guide some cats into a trap with a laser pointer. You can use a pointer from quite a distance away, too. Another distraction technique is to hang a piece of cooked chicken from a string above the trigger plate. The cat will likely need to step on the trigger to reach the chicken.

Place the trap in a more secluded location or camouflage the trap. Moving the trap to a quieter or more protected location can raise the cat's comfort level enough to enter. Or, you can try to blend the trap in with its surroundings. First, hide the trap under a bush, under a leaning piece of wood, or in a box so the cat feels like he is entering a dark hole. To further disguise the trap, cover it with branches, leaves, camouflage material, burlap or other natural materials. Even simply covering the trap with dark cloth or a towel can do the trick. Be sure that the coverings you use do not interfere with the trap door closing.

Withhold food. For a particularly trap-savvy cat, you might consider withholding food for a meal or two before, as necessary, but do not withhold food for any longer. Never withhold water.

Spring the trap yourself. It is possible to manually spring the trap. You can do this by propping the trap door up with a piece of wood or soda bottle and tying a pull string to it. When the cat you want enters, simply pull the string to close the trap. Be sure you practice first.

Use a drop trap. If you are still unable to trap a cat or if the cat has learned how to steal bait without springing the trap, consider using a drop trap, which does not rely on a trigger plate to close the trap door. Drop traps allow you to catch a cat without having to force him into a confined space. These traps are generally large, mesh covered squares that, when triggered by you with a rope, fall down over the cat. All drop traps allow you to easily transfer the cat from the drop trap to a regular metal trap. Drop traps can be borrowed, built or purchased and generally require the help of another person. More information can be found online by searching "drop trap".

Take a break from trapping. If a cat will not go into a trap after repeated attempts, take a break for a week or two (except in the case of an injured cat). The trap-shy cat needs to be reconditioned to not be afraid to go in the trap.

ADAPTED FROM ALLEY CAT ALLIES

www.alleycat.org