

# Trapping – The Basics

The following article is reprinted from the Alley Cat Allies' fact sheet "Humane Trapping Instructions for Feral Cats." It contains all the basic instructions you'll need for trapping individual cats. See "Mass Trapping" on the Info page for how to apply this basic knowledge to large-scale project at [www.neighborhoodcats.org](http://www.neighborhoodcats.org).



Quickly covering trapped cats calms them down

## Humane Trapping Instructions For Feral Cats

Trapping the feral cats, in order to have them sterilized and vaccinated is the first and most important step in a humane, nonlethal management plan for the feral cats you feed. While trapping may seem intimidating, following these steps will help make your efforts successful.

### Before You Trap

We recommend that you establish a routine feeding schedule. Feed the cats at the same time and place each day and for at least one week prior to trapping.

You should assess the cat or cats you are trying to trap. Determine if some cats are tame (friendly) and can be adopted into homes. Decide how you will handle kittens you trap. Use the Alley Cat Allies tracking sheet to give each cat in the colony a name and document his or her features. This information will help you with the veterinary records as you begin your TNR program.

### Withhold Food

You must withhold all food 24 hours before trapping. This will ensure that the cats are hungry enough to enter the trap. Also, surgery will be easier on the cats if they have not eaten for the past 24 hours.

While this may be hard, particularly if the cats appear hungry, remember you are doing what is best for them. Continue to provide the cats with clean, fresh drinking water.

### Supplies

In order to trap effectively you will need:

- One humane box trap per cat. You will be more successful if you trap as many cats as possible in the first trapping session. You may also space out your traps by using a specially designed wire sided transfer cage, designed to fit with a humane box trap, so that there is no risk of the cat escaping as she moves into the transfer cage.
- A can of tuna in oil, sardines in oil, mackerel, or other enticing bait.
- Newspaper to line the bottom of each trap (optional).
- A large towel or cloth for each trap or transfer cage, large enough to cover the entire trap on all sides. After a cat has been trapped cover the trap to calm the cat and lessen the risk of injury.
- Lids or small containers to hold bait (optional). You may also put bait directly on the trap or newspaper.
- Flashlight. If you are trapping early in the morning or late at night, you'll need the flashlight to identify the cats you've caught.
- Pens or pencils and cage slips for each cat, and masking tape to attach cage slips to each trap (optional).
- Tracking sheet to ID cats and to record information.
- Spoons or a scoop for the bait, and a can opener if you need one.
- Extra cat food and clean water to leave after you trap for any cats you have already TNRed or were unable to trap this time.

- Tools like pliers, a pocket knife, and some WD40 for traps that might not work properly. Always check traps prior to arriving at trapping site.
- Hand sanitizer, jug of water, and gloves for your protection.

*(Note from Neighborhood Cats: if you are going to transport the cat in your car or especially a taxi, tape a plastic trash bag around the bottom of the trap [before catching the cat] to prevent urine from getting on the seat. Make sure this does not interfere with the trap mechanism by testing the trap after you're done taping.)*

### **Start Trapping**

To begin, prepare the traps near your vehicle or away from the trapping site. Place the trap on a flat surface as you bait and set it. Do this so that if a trap doesn't work properly or goes off too easily it will not scare off the cats.

Unlatch the rear door and take it off so you can get your hands inside the trap. If your trap does not have a rear door then you might want to secure the front door open with a twist tie so that it won't keep falling shut while you work.

If you use newspaper, fold it lengthwise and place it inside the bottom of the trap, to disguise the wires on the bottom of the trap. Do not use newspaper if it is windy.

Place approximately one tablespoon of bait along the very back of the trap. You can use a lid or container for this if you wish. Now drizzle some juice from the bait along the trap towards the entrance in a zigzag pattern. Place about one-fourth teaspoon of bait in the middle of the trap on the trip-plate, and one-fourth teaspoon about six inches inside the front of the trap. The cat will move his or her paws trying to get the zigzagged bait, thus springing the trap. It is important not to leave too much bait in the front or middle; this may satisfy the cat and she will leave without setting off the trap.

Now take the traps to the trapping site, most likely the feeding area. Place the trap on the ground and make certain it is stable and will not rock or tip. *(Note from NC: try to place the trap length-wise against a wall, a fence, etc., and not leave it out in the open.)*

If you are using multiple traps, stagger them, and place them facing in different directions. Try to think like a cat and place the traps where they will be tempting. Move quietly and slowly, and try to remain relaxed so your mannerisms won't frighten cats away.

Set the traps. Leave the area quietly. The cats are unlikely to enter the traps if you are standing nearby. You may want to go sit in your car or take a walk for a while. If you are trapping in your yard you can go inside.

Traps should never be left unattended for more than two hours under any circumstances. It is preferable to quietly check the traps more frequently from a distance. You do not want to leave a cat in the trap for too long. Also, traps may be stolen, damaged, or set off. Someone who does not understand your intentions may release a trapped cat. *(Note from NC: Sometimes it's wise to chain and lock the trap onto a post, a window grill, a pipe, etc., so no one can walk off with the cat.)*

Have your towels or trap covers ready when you check the traps, in case you've caught a cat. Trapping feral cats may take some time. Be patient. Once a cat appears, it may take a few minutes for him to go into the trap. Make sure the trap is sprung, and the cat securely trapped, before you come out to cover the trap.

### **Some Special Trapping Tips**

If some cats won't go into the traps, you may want to try feeding them in unset traps for several days before trapping. Feed the cats in the same place and time as always. Wire the doors to the traps open and place the food inside. Once the cats see other cats eating inside the traps they will try it themselves. Once they become accustomed to the traps they will be easier to 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 instead. We have instructions on how to build and use a drop-trap to catch the uncatchable feral cat.

### **After Trapping**

After the cat has been caught, cover the entire trap with a towel or cloth before moving it. Covering the traps will help to keep the cats calm. It is normal for the cat to thrash around inside the trap. It is very tempting to release him but he will not hurt himself if the trap is covered. If a cat has already hurt himself, do not release him. Most injuries from traps are very minor, such as a bruised nose. The cat will calm down once the trap is covered.

If you trap a severely injured or sick cat, rush him or her to the veterinary clinic.

Once you have trapped as many cats as you can, transport the cat/s in the traps to the veterinary hospital. If you need to hold the cats overnight, keep them in their traps and make sure they are dry and warm. They can stay in a basement or isolated room if the weather is poor. It is possible for the cat to die from hypothermia confined in a trap outside in cold weather. A simple guideline: If it is too cold outside for you, then it is too cold for the cats. Do not leave cats in traps exposed to excessive heat or sun.

After surgery, allow the cat to recover overnight in the same trap, still covered. Usually the veterinarian's staff will replace any soiled newspaper in the bottom of the trap with fresh newspaper. If they do not do this, ask them to. Fresh newspaper will make the cats more comfortable during recovery.

Female cats usually need to be held for 24 to 48 hours after surgery. Male cats can be returned to the trapping site 12 to 24 hours following surgery as long as they are fully awake and do not require further medical attention. Make sure all cats are fully conscious and alert before release. (**Note from NC:** *Neighborhood Cats recommends a minimum of 48 hours recovery time for males and females.*)

If the cat needs further care (longer than 48 hours) you will need to transfer her into a holding pen or cat playpen. (**Note from NC:** *We've routinely held cats recovering from mild illness safely in traps for up to two weeks - the trap must be at least 36 inches long.*)

Release the cat in the same place you trapped him or her. Open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. If the trap has a rear door, pull the door up and off, pull off the cover, then walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. He is simply reorienting himself to his surroundings. It is not uncommon for the cat to stay away for a few days after release; he will return eventually. Keep leaving food and water out, he may eat when you're not around.

Never release the cat into a new area. If the cat needs to be relocated, please use Alley Cat Allies Relocation Guidelines. Contact us for a copy. Relocating cats without the proper steps can endanger the cat's life. She will try to return to her old home, and may become lost or attempt to cross major roads. Also, feral cats form strong bonds with other cats in their colonies. Separating a cat from her colony members and leaving her alone in a new environment will cause stress, depression, and loneliness.

Network with other caretakers at <http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/feralcatsinsouthcentralpa/>