

# TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN TRAINING MANUAL

## Cat Trapping 101

Following lists all the materials and equipment you need to trap a cat. Safeguard traps, small paper plates, canned cat food with pop-top, newspaper (optional), trap covers, large absorbent towel, gloves, disposable towels (Wet Ones) for hand clean-up, small heavy water crock, and an "isolator" - a large comb-like object that will help you care for the cat while it is in the trap. Our Companions Sterile Feral program provides the trapping equipment you will need.



Identify your traps. Our Companions' traps are already labeled.



Traps should always be marked with your name and a way to contact you. If you are not comfortable using your home address, give a cell phone or pager number. In some states it is illegal to set a trap without identifying it. If you accidentally catch wildlife in it, then you are almost certainly in violation of state trapping laws if the trap is unmarked. Our Companions traps will be given to you with identification plates already installed.

## Before You Trap

Establish a routine feeding schedule. If you suspect neighbors are feeding the cats, explain what you are doing and ask them to stop feeding the cats until all trapping is completed. Begin to feed the cats at the same time and place each day for at least one week prior to trapping. Use this time to assess the cats you will be trapping. Determine if some are tame and can be adopted. If you see kittens, contact Our Companions and we will help you determine the best strategy for helping the kittens. Document all the cats you see with a name and description. This is also the time to determine where the cat(s) will be kept as they await the appointment for their surgery and where they will recover.

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

## Prepare To Trap

First, don't be scared off by all the "don'ts" below. It is relatively simple to safely capture a cat without injury if you simply think about your actions ahead of time, and act quietly and calmly around the cat.

1. Familiarize yourself with how the trap works. How does the front door open? How does the hook hold the door up and set the pan? How does the back door come off and on, and how does it lock? When the trap is set, does it fire easily when you poke the pan gently? If this is not readily apparent to you, and you cannot set your trap, instructions will be given later on.
2. Find a safe trapping site. The trap should be situated in a sheltered area out of the sun. Do not set the trap against the side of a building unless gutters are in good repair or the weather is guaranteed to be clear. A trap set under the drip-edge of a house can kill a kitten by pouring water over it. Do not set the trap in culverts or ditches where rain could quickly swamp it. Do not set the trap in public view. Passersby will assume the trap is set to kill animals, and may release your cat. Always set the trap on level ground. If there is any danger of it rolling, stabilize it with a cement block or other heavy object on either side. Never set a trap on a roof, on a steep slope, or near a cliff edge--the cat could roll it off the edge once trapped inside. **LOOK AROUND.** What is the worst thing that could happen to the trap in the situation where you are setting it? Anticipate the worst, and then take steps to prevent it from happening.
3. Whenever possible, obtain permission of the landowner, preferably in writing. This is especially important if you will be trapping at night when police might see you. It also may be required by law. Trapping without permission is trespass. If you risk this for the sake of saving a cat's life, that's up to you, but realize you are choosing to break the law, and don't call the poor cop "animal-hater" if he or she must ticket you if the landowner complains about your actions!
4. Take steps to reduce the chance of nontarget captures (raccoons, skunks, etc.). Trap during the day and close traps at dusk or just after dusk. Elevating traps on a picnic table etc, (fasten the trap down!) will keep out skunks, but not raccoons and opossums. Do not relocate wildlife. You need to have a trapping license for this. If you accidentally catch wildlife and do not have the proper license, you must release the animal on site. The best thing to do is avoid the problem entirely. If you must trap

at night, try to find a way to monitor your traps. For example, you could sit in your vehicle with the trap in view.

Please don't be one of those folks who assume because they live in the city, or they have "never seen any wild animals around," that you won't catch a skunk, opossum, or raccoon. These animals are more common in the city than in the country, and do not leave signs that untrained folk normally notice. If you have cats, then you definitely have raccoons and skunks.

5. Do not leave traps unattended! Either monitor your traps by staying on site (watching from car or window), or check traps frequently. Wildlife trappers will often leave traps unattended for 24 hours. Skunks and raccoons often simply curl up and go to sleep once they realize they are stuck. Cats, however, may injure themselves attempting to get out of the trap. It is common for cats in uncovered traps to rub fur off their faces and paws, break teeth and claws, etc. In addition, passersby are more likely to release a cat from a trap, than a skunk, especially a forlornly meowing kitten. Cat traps must be checked far more frequently than wildlife traps for the protection of the cat and the public.
6. Always make sure you have made plans for the humane housing and neutering of the cat BEFORE you trap it. If you figured you would keep the cat in the garage but the garage gets hot when it is over 90 degrees, what is the weather outlook for the next few days? Did you warn your spouse or parents that you were up to this?

## Baiting and Covering the Trap

The baited trap, before covering. See information below photograph.



1. Spread smelly, fish type cat food on a small paper plate. Slather it on so the cat will have to spend some time in the trap. Don't throw a single sardine on the plate. The cat will walk in, grab it, and may walk out with dinner without stepping on the pan.
2. If the trap is on nice level land, place some pine needles, a few leaves, etc. on the floor of the trap so the cat doesn't have to stand on wire (this is unnecessary if the trap is on a solid porch floor or similar surface). If the ground is badly scuffed up and the cat would basically be walking on plain wire over

air, due to small dips in the ground, you might consider using a single piece of newspaper in the manner pictured above, to create a smooth walking surface. However, if the cat is being kept overnight in the trap, newspaper may get ripped to bits, or may prevent feces and urine from passing through the wire. Only use newspaper if you feel it is necessary, or the animal will be immediately removed from the trap.

3. **VERY IMPORTANT.** Set small pieces of "lead in" bait at the front door of the trap, and about halfway back. This will get the cat to step into your trap and notice the bait at the very back.



Your trap should look like the set above (with or without newspaper).

## **COVER YOUR TRAPS!!!!**

It is very important to cover the trap, especially if the trap is in public view. Pillowcases slit up one side, fastened with clothespins, make good cheap trap covers.

If you fail to cover the trap:

1. You will waste time. The cat will spend much of its time sniffing around the back at the bait which it can see sitting in there. The cat may even yank at the back of the trap and set off the trap. The cover encourages the cat to go immediately to the front trap door.
2. The cat may injure itself if the trap is unattended for any length of time. It will feel exposed, and does not understand that flimsy wire is a solid force. It will continue to try to escape, rubbing its face raw, and breaking teeth and claws.
3. The cat will freak out when you approach. A covered cat may still struggle, but will be less panicked if it can hide in the covered section of the trap. In a covered trap, its struggles are less alarming to people who may be watching you.

*Note:* Raccoons destroy trap covers. They will pull the entire thing right into the trap with them and make a horrendous mess. Accept this, and be prepared to write off a certain number of trap covers if you leave traps

unattended during the evening. It actually is good for the raccoon to have the cover to mangle-it will spend more time mangling the cover, and less time hurting its paws by yanking at the wire, trying to get out. It is best to avoid trapping at night. Releasing a raccoon is one thing. Releasing a skunk is another.

Once you have trapped your cat, immediately cover the ENTIRE trap before moving the trapped animal.



Covered traps keep cats quiet, uninjured, and prevent distressing any person who may see you moving the cat.

### **Holding a Cat Overnight in a Cage Trap**

Since the cat is going to the veterinarian to be neutered the next morning, keep the cat in the trap and move the cat to your safe, climate-controlled location. Leaving the cat in the trap is the safest and most humane option. This is why we prefer Safeguard traps, which are wider than Tomahawk, Havahart, or Tru-Catch traps.

The Sterile Feral program requires that during the trapping period and following surgery, the cats will be held in their traps and should never be let out except while at the vet and when they're being returned to their colony. We have encountered resistance at times from well-meaning people, who believe it's cruel to leave a cat in a trap for more than 48 hours. When they let the cat out or try to move it to a bigger cage, the cat invariably escapes and becomes loose in their home. This is a dangerous, stressful and inhumane thing to do to a feral cat.

In addition to keeping you and the cat safe, keeping the cat in the trap will help the cat feel secure. Feral cats don't act like domestics. Whether they're in a large cage or a trap, they will tend to remain still in one place. They also prefer to be in tighter rather than wide open enclosures. As long as the trap is long enough (at least 36 inches) for them to huddle at one end and eat at the other, and the trap is kept covered with a thin sheet, they will be fine.

If, for some reason, the cat requires a longer term recovery (more than 4-5 days), contact Our Companions to get information and advice on how to safely transfer the cat into cage.



1. Put the trap in a protected, secure area like a shed, screened porch, etc. Do not leave the trap outdoors. If the weather is hot, flies will be attracted by the food and may lay fly eggs in any small wounds on the cat's body. If the weather is cold, wind chill can kill the cat. Passing predators and humans (neighbor's dog) can terrorize the animal. The cat should be inside, or secured in the back of a covered vehicle.

This should be obvious, but do not keep a cat inside an unventilated vehicle in hot weather. A feral cat that is used to outdoor weather will be fine in the back of a pickup truck with a cap on in the winter, if the trap is covered to keep body warmth in, and the trap is on a towel to absorb moisture. Be careful about transporting cats in covered truck beds if the vehicle is in poor condition and carbon monoxide poisoning is a possibility. Never transport an animal in the trunk of a vehicle.

2. The cat will need water. The cat should not be fed if it is facing surgery the next day, but if not, the cat should be fed as well as watered.

Our Sterile Feral program has provided you with specially designed traps and an isolator. Please follow the instructions below to keep you and your feral safe.

1. Go to one side of the trap and slowly pull the cover back. Feral cats hide when they are exposed. Accordingly, they will move from the light side (your side) to the dark side (other side of the trap). Occasionally, you may have to gently push the cat with the isolator or give the trap a little shake to get him to move. Lower the isolator through the bars of the trap from above. If you have a person to help, have them hold the isolator down firmly against the bottom of the cage while you clean and restock food and water. If you are alone, we recommend you have a second isolator, lower it right behind the first one. We highly recommend you use two trap isolators until you're very comfortable with the process and know each cat. If you want to be even extra-safe, then lower one isolator from the top and insert the second one horizontally through the trap from the side.
2. When the cat is isolated on one end, line the bottom of the trap on the other end with newspaper. This will serve as "litter." You can also use "wee-wee" pads. Do not use regular litter in a pan. The cat will just trash it and create a mess. When you are finished lining one side of the trap,

remove the isolators and cover the side back up. Note: always begin with the "litter" side. This way, there's no chance the cat will back up and sit on his food and/or water.

3. Next, go to the other end of the trap and isolate the cat against the end you just worked on. Once the isolators are in place open the trap and put in the food and/or water in their dishes. \* Remember, cats cannot eat the night before surgery. When you are finished, remove the isolators and cover the trap.

Always move quietly and calmly. If you use a veterinarian outside the network of our Sterile Feral program, be sure to lend them your isolator. As you can see from the below image, the cat can be squeezed against the end of the trap with this device, and can be given its anesthesia shot right inside the trap. The veterinarians who participate in the Sterile Feral Program have had isolators provided to them. The cat can stay in the trap while falling asleep, and then, after surgery, a clean towel or "wee-wee pad" will be placed inside the trap and the cat put inside to recover.



Fed, Watered, Covered, On Absorbent Towel, for the Night.

Make sure all doors are securely latched (and back sliding door LOCKED), the trap is on a towel to absorb urine, and the trap is entirely covered. It may be a good idea to have plastic under the towel if the floor is wood or carpet.

Now, leave the poor cat alone. Don't be peeking in on it every ten minutes, even if it is howling pathetically. It does not want you to look at it. It does not want to hear your voice. Dark and quiet will be the best gift you can give the cat at this point. Do NOT play music or the radio. These techniques help when attempting to tame a cat, but right now you just want this cat to be as relaxed as possible. This is not the time to get it used to a human voice, especially if it is facing surgery in the morning. Remember, no food after 9:00 p.m. if there is surgery scheduled the next day. .



## **Trapping in Winter**

With care, trapping can be done humanely in winter, and indeed, cats are easier to find in winter, because they can be tracked. In fact, kittens and injured cats may not survive winter conditions, and waiting until spring simply isn't an option. Situations involving human health, for example, a colony that has had cats come down with rabies cannot be ignored until the weather is better.

Very special care is required if cats are being neutered and returned. Cats must be caged indoors for at least three days for a male, and five days for a female, after neutering before releasing the cat back into the cold. Anesthesia depresses a cat's system, and they will more easily die of hypothermia if simply dumped back into the cold after surgery.

We also feel that EVERY cat requires and deserves shelter. Cats are not wild animals. They cannot dig dens as most non-climbing wild animals do. They do not shelter in tree holes, as most climbing wild animals do. They will not share ground dens with other species, as many wild animals do. Cats cannot build their own shelter, therefore it must be provided for them. In our opinion, there is absolutely no exception to this.

If the cat does not have a shed or other building available, a shelter must be built for it. Even when a shed or building is available, a sleeping box should be provided as well. "Humane Care" does not just mean keeping animals alive. It means permitting them some level of enjoyment and comfort in life, as well. If a cat is miserably cold for six months out of each year, this is not humane care.

## **How Trapping in Winter Differs from Summer Trapping**

Look for cat tracks and determine where cats are traveling. Pick the most sheltered spot where you find tracks, and begin to pre-bait at that spot with dry cat food. If your normal site to feed your cats is out in the open, you will need to slowly move that site to a more sheltered location.

Monitor tracks to note when the cat is visiting the food.

Wrap the trap in a good quality sheet. The sheet should go all the way around the trap, twice, and all sides, except the trap door, should be covered. This includes the bottom. Make sure there is a bit of a flap of sheet at the trap door end that will fall down over that end when the trap door is tripped by the cat.

Cut a piece of plastic (or garbage bag) and lay that under where the trap is going to be set. Don't let large pieces stick out from under the trap. They will flap in the wind and frighten the cat away. In the photo at top you can just barely see the clear plastic garbage bag under the trap.

Bait the wrapped trap with dry cat food in a small bowl behind the pan, and add a few drops of fish oil or cod liver oil. Wet food will simply freeze in cold weather, and will not smell. If you know that the cat visits the spot every day at 4:00 pm, then by all means use wet food and set your trap at 3:00 pm. But if the cat might not show up for hours, use dry food and fish oil.

Set the trap on the plastic, in your sheltered spot out of the wind. You can create a sheltered spot by leaning a piece of plywood against a building, if needed. Make sure the trap is positioned so that wind does not blow into the open trap door. If there is snow, push some up against the sides of the trap a little bit, to keep the cover from flapping in the wind.

Make sure to put your lead-in bait in the trap to encourage the cat to go inside.

When trapped, the sheet will fall down over the door a bit, cutting the wind. The plastic will keep the snow from melting under the cat when it curls up to keep warm, keeping the cat dry. The sheet will cut the wind, providing far more shelter than the cat had while wandering exposed.



Traps should always be set out of public view; always post signs with your phone number, since your trap tag will be covered by the sheet. Watch the traps. Do not leave them. While the cat is protected from the elements in the trap, it is not safe to leave him in the trap for over an hour.

## **Advantages to Trapping in Winter**

It is less likely that you will catch wildlife, so traps can remain out at night, to catch extremely shy cats that do not frequent the site during the day.

You can monitor numbers by watching tracks.

The cats are neutered or removed for socialization **BEFORE SPRING** and breeding season.

If cats are to be returned to the site, they will be wormed, etc. and are more likely to survive the winter.

## **Post Surgical Care:**

After surgery, the cats will need to be kept in a safe, warm place. It is a good idea to have this space ready ahead of time. A heated garage, extra room, bathroom, basement or laundry room can work well. The area should be quiet, sheltered, and off-limits to any other animals. It also must be warm and dry. DO NOT leave the cat(s) in the trap outdoors. It is important that the recovery location be temperature-controlled to keep the cat from getting too hot or too cold. They are unable to properly control their body temperatures when they are recovering from anesthesia.

Normal behaviors that occur during recovery include deep sleep, head bobbing, wobbly movements, fast breathing, overreacting to sounds or motions, vocalization and shivering. No cat should be released the next day if she still has these signs.

### **Please keep the following in mind:**

Feral cats should be kept safe and warm **inside** and monitored for at least 24-48 hours until they are ready to be released back to their habitats.

- **Male cats need 24 hours**
- **Female cats need 48 hours**

If awake and alert, release them in the morning, males the next day after surgery and females keep 1 extra night. However, no cat should be released until you're sure the cat is fully awake. If the cat is lethargic, call the clinic and you may need to bring the cat back to the clinic to be checked.

### **Caring for cats in traps:**

During the trapping period and following surgery, the cats will be held in their traps - they should never be let out except while at the vet and when they're being returned to their colony. We have encountered resistance at times from well-meaning people, including animal welfare professionals, who believe it's cruel to leave a cat in a trap for more than 48 hours. Our experience is quite the contrary. Feral cats don't act like domestics. Whether they're in a large cage or a trap, they will tend to remain still in one place. They also prefer to be in tighter rather than wide open enclosures - apparently, they feel more secure. As long as the trap is long enough (at least 36 inches) for them to huddle at one end and eat at the other, and the trap is kept covered with a thin sheet, they will be fine.



Trap dividers keep the cat at one end while you feed and clean at the other

### **Materials needed**

- Traps large enough to double as cages (preferably 36" long) and with rear doors (a must!)
- Trap divider; sometimes called trap isolators - they look like small pitchforks.
- Newspaper

### **Preparing the holding space**

The holding space itself should be secure, dry, quiet and warm. Put plastic under the cage to catch any waste or elimination. Be sure to ALWAYS keep trap covered. (NOTE: In the hours after surgery, a cat's body temperature will drop, so the recovery space during this time MUST be warm. Do not place post-surgery cats in a cold room.)

### **Cleaning and feeding**

1. Use the trap dividers to isolate the cat on one end of the trap. You do this by lowering one divider through the bars of the trap from above, then by lowering a second divider right behind it, also from above. We highly recommend you use two trap dividers until you're very comfortable with the process and know each cat. If you want to be even extra-safe, then lower one divider from the top and insert the second one horizontally through the trap from the side.

You can get the cat to move from one end of the trap to the other usually by uncovering the sheet on the end you want to work on. The cat will seek cover at the other end. Occasionally, you might have to poke him or give the trap a little shake to get him to move.

2. While the cat is isolated on one end, line the bottom of the trap on the other end with newspaper. This will serve as "litter." If you try to use regular litter in a pan, the cat will just trash it and create even more of a mess. At the rear door end of the trap, put in the food and water in their dishes.
3. Go to the other end of the trap and isolate the cat against the end you just worked on. Again, line the bottom with newspaper and, if you're at the trap door end, put in the small towel. The cats like lying on it, especially when it's up against the slanted trap door. If possible, work on the trap door end first and the rear door side last. That way, there's no chance the cat will end up sitting in the food and water after you've just put it in.
4. Ideally, repeat this process twice a day. This will keep the traps relatively clean and the cats calm. Don't try to be perfect - the space will probably end up smelling, but when the cats are released, you just roll up the plastic, throw it away and the smell will dissipate. While the cats are being neutered, you can replace the ground cloth with a fresh one.

The cat may be groggy after surgery, but should be fully awake by the evening. When you get home, place the covered trap in the recovery area and leave the cat alone for a little while. Make sure all trap doors are securely shut and latched.

Feed the cat once or twice a day during the holding period. The cat might not urinate or defecate during the first day or two of the holding period. This is normal.

Once the cat is eating, is alert, and has clear eyes, she can be returned to her colony habitat. Try to release the cat as close as possible to where you trapped her. This is very important, for cats are territorial and may become vulnerable if released in an unfamiliar area. Choose a time of day when fewer people will be in that area.

We do not recommend holding feral cats for extended times following surgery. This is for two reasons: first, they are very stressed in confinement; stress is not conducive to healing, and the cat may or may not eat due to stress. Second, you will not be able to inspect a feral cat's surgical incision as you would with a pet cat. Feral cats are happiest and healthiest if returned to their normal habitat the day following surgery.

## **Releasing your Feral**

When cats are ready for release, return to the area in which they were captured and release them there. Do not relocate the animal! It will be disoriented and most likely die.

Make sure the spot you pick for release does not encourage the cat to run into danger (like a busy street) to get away from you. Keep the trap covered until you are ready to release. When ready, simply hold the trap with the door facing **away** from you and open the door. The cat will probably bolt immediately out of the trap. If it is confused, just tilt the trap so the back is slightly up and tap on the back of the trap to encourage it to leave. Never put your hand in the trap! If the animal still will not leave, prop the door open with a stick and leave it for a while.

After releasing the cats hose off traps and disinfect them with bleach. Never store traps in the "set" position (door open); animals may wander into even unbaited traps and starve to death.

## **What else?**

For other advice regarding the taming and/or fostering of feral or orphaned kittens please call us at (860) 242-9999. We have trained Animal Welfare Professionals ready to help you help the animals.



Thank you for participating in the Sterile Feral program!

Our Companion's Sterile Feral Program