

Trapping 101

1. **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.

a. Line the 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 - this is done so the wind will not move the newspaper and frighten the cats. Should you open the rear door, be sure to relock it before trapping. If your trap does not have a rear door, you can secure the front door open with a twist tie while you work and then remove it for trapping. You may need to have several different areas to set traps when trapping an entire colony; in this case, tag the traps with a description of the location so that you can return the cats exactly where you trapped them.

b. Bait the traps. Place approximately one tablespoon of bait (tuna, sardines, or other strong smelling food - usually the ones in oil work best) at the very back of the trap, so that 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 that 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 ($\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon) 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 for two reasons: 1) the cat may be satisfied before making it to the trip plate, and 2) cats should have a relatively empty stomach for at least 12 hours before surgery.

c. 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.

2. **Keep track of the traps at all times.** Traps should never be left unattended. Check the traps frequently from a distance. Choose a location to 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.

Leaving a cat uncovered in a trap for too long will increase the cat's stress and could lead to injury since they thrash against the cage. (You may want to place a 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.) Also, traps may be stolen, damaged, or sprung, or someone who does not understand your intentions may release a trapped cat so it is important to monitor the traps at all times and have an exact count of how many traps you start and end with.

In larger colonies there may be multiple trapping locations. It is important not to leave any traps unsupervised, so consider bringing multiple trappers to help. If you are trapping alone don't put out more traps than you can keep an eye on – two or three at most.

Be prepared for the fact that you may trap cats that are already eartipped. 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.

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 the trap.

3. **After the cat has been trapped**, cover the entire trap with a large towel or sheet 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 covered. Remember, you are doing this for their benefit. If they are released, they will continue to breed, and you may 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 pad.

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. Instead, when you are setting the traps out, you can partially cover them to help calm the cats once they are trapped. Since they will at least have a part of the trap that is covered, they can feel safe and you can keep the trap where it is. This helps reduce stress to the trapped cat and reduce the odds of other cats being frightened away.

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.

4. **You may be faced with particularly hard-to-trap cats**. Cats can become trap-shy—frightened to go near or enter a trap, or trap-savvy—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.
5. **Take the cats to a veterinarian or a spay/neuter clinic**. You should have already made appointments for sterilization and vaccination before beginning to trap. Confirm that only dissolvable sutures will be used, eliminating the need for a follow-up visit to remove stitches.

If your appointments are not the same day as the trapping, keep the cats indoors in their covered traps and make sure they are dry, in a 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 very 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.)

6. **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.

After the surgery, the cats need a temperature-controlled, safe place to recover and should be monitored closely. Once they are ready to return to their outdoor homes, you can continue with your regular colony care.

