



Tree House Humane Society

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www.treehouseanimals.org/TNR www.tnrchicago.org

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR): Trapping Instructions & Frequently Asked Questions

Where should I get a humane trap?

You can borrow a trap from Tree House or, if you plan on tackling a large colony, you may want to consider buying your own trap. At Tree House we use Tru-Catch traps and Tomahawk traps. Good sites to order these and other traps include www.animal-care.com and www.animal-traps.com. We recommend buying traps with two doors, a trap door and a release door, to facilitate baiting the trap and using it for recovery. Our most popular trap is the Tru-Catch 30 LTD Light Duty Deluxe because it is relatively lighter weight and still sturdy, with two doors. Please call Tree House at 773.784.5488, ext. 0, for more information about our trap-lending service.

How do I safely and humanely trap a feral cat?

You should familiarize yourself with the trap and test it before attempting to use it. If you rent the trap from Tree House, we will show you how to use it when you pick it up. It is important to NEVER leave a set trap unattended for more than 20-30 minutes at a time. Ideally, you should watch the trap from a comfortable distance. When the trap is sprung, quickly move the cat in the covered trap to a safe area indoors.

1. **Trap-Setting Instructions for Tru-Catch Traps (brown):** Locate the two rings on either side of the front door. Using both hands, lift both rings all the way up, and then lift up the front door as far as it will go. Locate the bar that runs the length of the trap. Notice that it ends by the front door with an L-shape. While still holding the door all the way open, lift the bottom of the L-shaped rod so that the rod rotates and props open the front door.

Trap-Setting Instructions for **Tomahawk Traps (silver)**: Open the trap by lifting the wire handle that secures the trap door. While holding the wire handle up, push the spring mechanism in and pull the door up until it is parallel with the ground. Put your hand under the door to hold it up, and pull the arm that runs the length of the trap downward and toward the open door. Place the small hook at the end of the arm closest to the open door in the notch to set the trap.

2. When the trap is set, **the trip plate will be slanted upwards**. When the cat walks into the trap, he must step on the trip plate to cause the door to shut behind him.
3. **Trap-Rehearsal Feeding- Optional:** If you plan ahead, you can feed the cat inside the unset trap so he gets used to going into the trap. Sometimes this is not necessary, but with trap-wary cats or when timing is important, trap-rehearsals can help guarantee success. Also, if you need to trap a group of cats, trap-rehearsals will help all the cats have positive associations with the traps, and make trapping an entire group more effective. With some traps you can fully remove the back door for the rehearsal stage. For example, most of our silver Tomahawk traps have a fully removable back door. With other traps you can use a plastic zip tie, twist-ties, twine or cable to secure the back door in an upright position. This may be easier and slightly safer than securing the front door. Start by placing food at the open-door entrance, before the open door. Each day, move the food a couple of inches inside the trap until the food is all the way inside, at the closed end of the trap. When you are ready to do your actual trapping, be sure that the back door is in-place and secure, and you are opening the front door. You can rotate the trap so that the cat feels he is

entering the same way as in the rehearsals. Remember to remove your ties, test and set the trap for the actual trapping.

4. If trapping in a public place, we recommend placing **signage** on the trap to alert others of your good intentions.
5. It is a good idea to **cover the trap** with an old sheet, blanket or towel. This will help the cat to feel safe and will prevent him from trying to snatch food through the outside. Tuck the cover underneath the trap to prevent the wind from causing it to flap and scare the cat. **Line the trap floor** with newspaper or a towel. Cats don't like the feeling of wire mesh between their toes.
6. **Bait the trap:** Put the trap as close as possible to where the cat is accustomed to eating. Put the food at the opening of the trap the first day, and gradually move the food plate back a little each day until it's behind the trip plate. If you do not have multiple days to train the cat in this manner, put a very tiny amount of food at the beginning and middle of the trap, to make the cat want more and go towards the back of the trap to eat the food. You can also drip tuna juice or sardine oil along the newspaper that lines the trap, and the appealing smell will help to motivate the cat.
7. **Timing & Testing:** Plan to trap the night before or early the morning of your spay/neuter appointment. Be sure to use just enough to get him to go to the back of the trap, since the cat is not supposed to eat after midnight the night before the surgery. Test the trap away from the cat(s). Make sure that the newspaper, towel or food plate does not prevent the trip plate from functioning or the door from closing.
8. **When the cat is trapped,** immediately move the cat to a safe, quiet, indoor environment, keeping the trap covered. Try to remain calm, and watch your hands and fingers. The sheet you have over the trap, and using the trap handle, will help to protect you from injury. You may also wear heavy gloves to further protect hands.

When is the best time of the day to trap?

Trapping early in the morning or at dusk are the best times, but it is most important to trap during the times when you normally see or feed the cat. You may want to withhold food for a day or two before trapping to improve your chances of luring the cat into the trap with food.

Trapping at night is risky. You could trap opossums, raccoons, skunks or other wildlife. If you accidentally catch one of these animals, release them immediately.

Where do I keep the trapped cat the night before the veterinary appointment?

Keep the cat indoors where he will be safe from predators and the elements. Safe places include garages & sheds, basements, inside a spare room in the home, or, if you don't have much space, consider keeping the trap in the bathtub. Set up the area by lining the ground with a plastic sheet or tarp with newspapers on top. Make sure that all entrances to the room are closed.

How do I get food & water in the trap?

Do not give food to the cat after midnight the night prior to surgery. If there is food still in the trap at this time, carefully remove the food. Cats should have an empty stomach to prevent nausea caused by the anesthesia. Water should be provided at all times while the cat is not in transport. You can insert a small bowl of water into the end of the trap by slowly opening the back door and sliding it in. Feral cats will be afraid and will likely cower and hiss at the back of the trap. In any case, it is important to keep a close watch on him in case he lunges and to quickly close the door when finished. Most importantly, always avoid direct eye contact with the cat which he will interpret as a sign of aggression. Before transporting the cat to his appointment, remove the water bowl just as

quickly and carefully as you placed it inside, or you can use a wire hanger to spill the water out onto the newspaper if you don't want to open the door again. After surgery, an unbent wire hanger may be used to slowly upright overturned bowls. Use a water bottle to fill the water bowl and slide in filled food bowls or drop the food in through the holes in the trap. A funnel may also come in handy.

How do I fit a litter box in the trap?

With an adult cat in the trap, adding a litter box does not leave much space for food or for the cat to lie down. Those with small kittens may fit a small 9"x9" aluminum baking pan or a similar small container filled with litter through the rear of the trap (the side with the flat back panel). Feral cats/kittens may or may not use the litter box.

It is easier and more convenient to let the cats eliminate onto the newspaper beneath the trap. They will usually use the back of the trap since their food is at the front. When it is time to clean up, place fresh newspaper next to the trap, pick the trap up, and place it on the fresh newspaper. Roll up the soiled paper and toss it in the garbage.

After the cat has been released, the traps will have to be disinfected. Hose and bleach them down outside your home, or you can bring them to a carwash.

Can I trap during winter?

Yes. Winter is a good time to trap because there is a lull in breeding, especially in colder climates like here in Chicago. If you can get a colony finished before February or March it will be well worth it. Peak breeding season starts in February.

How should I care for the cats after surgery?

The cats must be kept warm and dry since they will not be able to regulate their body temperatures after surgery. Ideally, they should be kept at room temperature. If that is not possible, they can be kept in a garage or shed with blankets wrapped around the traps, leaving an opening for air circulation. You can also stuff a towel or small blanket in the trap as an extra comfort. You may want to use portable heaters and heat lamps in cold weather conditions but be sure to keep them away from flammable objects.

It is also a good idea to elevate the traps off the ground a few inches by placing the trap on 2x4s or on a wide and sturdy bench or table. You could also use several layers of carpet remnants, cardboard or something similar on the ground, cover with plastic sheets, and top off with newspaper to provide insulation.

Remember to keep newspaper on the floor of the trap and under the trap to absorb waste. It is also extremely important to make sure that the cats get plenty of water to prevent dehydration. Make sure they are eating well and eliminating before release.

How long should I wait before releasing the cats back to their territory?

If all goes well, we recommend keeping males for 24 hours during warm weather and 48 hours during winter. Females usually need at least one day more than males. Keep cats in their traps for the entire recovery period. Generally, if the cats are eating, drinking and eliminating regularly, they are ready to be returned to the original trapping site.

Please understand that it is detrimental to the cat's mental and physical health to keep them inside for any longer than necessary. They are bonded to their territory and will be relieved when you release them. As long as the sutures are still in place and there is no excess bleeding they should be ready to go in a day or two. If you have any doubts, please call Tree House or the facility where the surgery was performed. Be sure that the cats eat and drink plenty before releasing them since they may stay away for a few days after being released.

Should I trap a pregnant cat?

Yes, we recommend trapping and spaying pregnant cats. Animal Care and Control euthanizes more feral kittens than any other animals and we are flooded with kitten admission requests throughout the year. Female kittens may start to mate as young as four months of age, and the queens may start to mate again about 8-10 weeks after delivery. It is important to understand that the cat is not emotionally connected to her unborn kittens. She reproduces out of instinct. If anything, birthing kittens brings more stress to her life as she needs to work hard just to survive on her own. On the other hand, it would be traumatizing to her to take away her kittens after they are born and it is a lot of work to hand raise kittens. If a cat seems very pregnant, or you know she is due within one week, there are some risks involved with spay/abortion but our veterinarians take extra precautions to make sure the surgery is done safely. We have never had a problem performing a spay surgery on a pregnant cat.

What happens if I trap my neighbor's cat?

If you happen to trap a neighbor's cat which is not sterilized, you will need to consider whether to spay/neuter him. Our advice is to talk to your neighbor and explain what you are doing and why you want to sterilize the cat. You can also add that by letting the cat outside that they are violating a Chicago City ordinance which proclaims that all domestic animals must be leashed or contained within the guardian's property. We know of some people who have sterilized neighbor's cats and they report that most of the time, the neighbor was actually grateful. We know of no cases or lawsuits regarding the spay/neuter of a cat done by somebody other than the owner.

What if I trap a lactating queen (nursing mom cat)?

If a lactating female is trapped, the caregiver should check the area for kittens. If kittens are located, you can capture them by placing the trapped mother cat next to another baited trap. Some very young kittens can be caught without a trap, but they are often still too wild to be handled easily. It may be possible to capture them using a thick towel, but be aware they can bite and scratch. The same baiting method works the other way around. If lactating queens are captured and kittens cannot be located, every effort should be made to release the mother cat within 24 hours so she can care for and nurse her kittens.

What can I do about a feral cat that will not go into a trap?

Some feral cats are very trap savvy. Some even eat in the trap without triggering the trip plate. All you can do is be persistent. If you have been trying to trap for a while without success, you might want to take a week off and then start over by getting the cat used to eating in the trap again during a trap-rehearsal feeding. You may want to stop feeding for a day or two to ensure success but be sure not to go for more than three days without feeding them, and always provide water. You can make a trail of cat food or fish juice from the entrance to the back of the trap. It also helps to camouflage the trap by covering it or putting it in a box or another enclosure. If this still does not work keep trying, and contact Tree House for more trapping tips at tnr@treehouseanimals.org, or 773.784.5488, ext. 234.

Sometimes a **drop trap** works best for cats that are completely resistant to the standard box trap. Tree House has a limited number of drop traps to lend out using a waiting list and refundable deposit.

When should I trap kittens?

As soon as kittens are weaned from their mother's milk and out walking around on their own they are ready to be trapped. This can be as early as 5 – 6 weeks old.

I think the cat may be friendly. Should I try to pet him while he's in the trap?

Do NOT put your finger into a trap to try and pet a cat. It is best to leave them alone and not risk personal injury or undo stress on the cat by trying to pet him. Remember that there are **passive ferals** and **aggressive ferals**. Even if the trapped cat is not lunging he may still be feral, behaving in a passive manner, crouching and immobile out of fear of humans. Also, a feral may crouch immobile at one point, and lunge at another point. If they feel cornered, or threatened they may try and defend themselves by attacking you because they cannot flee. This does not mean that humans should feel afraid of feral cats outdoors. Feral cats avoid humans just like other wild animals.

An easy temperament test is to poke a wooden chopstick or plastic straw through the holes of the trap towards the cat. A domesticated cat will usually try to smell the object. A passive feral will ignore it and even act like he does not see it. An aggressive feral will lunge towards it. Do not use the same object for different cats as it may spread viruses from cat to cat.

It is best not to make a decision about the cat's temperament while they are in the trap. Their behavior may be drastically different in the trap than in an environment where they feel safe and are not stressed out.

Will the cat come back after being returned to the trapping site?

The cat may stay away for a few days. However, after she has calmed down and re-acclimated herself, she will most likely visit more frequently and stay for longer periods of time, especially if you are providing food and shelter.

If I trap a cat whose ear is already tipped, how do I know if he is up to date on inoculations?

If there is another feral cat caregiver in the immediate area you should first check with them. Some people keep very accurate records for their colony cats and will be able to give you updated information. In any case, what you do depends on your location: If you live in a town or municipality which mandates TNR and feral colony vaccinations, you should take the new cat in for vaccines. In Cook County, it is now illegal to feed outdoor, un-owned cats without being a **registered colony caretaker** with a sponsoring organization and practicing TNR, including rabies vaccination and responsible colony management. **The Cook County Managed Care of Feral Cats Ordinance**, Chapter 10 Animals, Article IV Managed Care of Feral Cats, Section 10-95 through 10-99, was passed and adopted October 16, 2007 and went into effect 30 days after that date. To learn more about this ordinance that can benefit feral cats, their human caretakers, and their human neighbors, see www.tnrchicago.org

Is it mandatory to give feral cats any inoculations? Are feral cats given a one-year or three-year rabies vaccination?

It depends on the ordinances in your community. In Cook County reasonable efforts should be made to re-trap the cat for another three-year rabies vaccination every three years. At Tree House we give a three-year rabies vaccination, which is the most beneficial for a feral cat that may never be back for a booster. As far as the "distemper" FVRCP vaccination, it does provide significant protection for a year even if only given once.