



## **Trapping Instructions**

# How to Trap a Feral Cat for Spay/Neuter Program

(taken from Feral Cat Coalition, [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com))

These instructions assume that trappers are using traps from the Tomahawk Live Trap Company. Specifics regarding the traps may be slightly different if you are using another type of trap. Make arrangements with the vet in advance of trapping.

## Preparation for trapping:

(taken from Feral Cat Coalition, [www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com))

If possible, get the cats used to being fed at the same place and time of day. Try leaving the trap unset and covered with a large towel during routine feeding so the animal will get used to seeing and smelling it in the area. For several days before you need to trap, put the food only inside the un-set traps. Don't feed the cats the day/night before you are going to trap so the cats will be hungry. Be sure to notify others who may feed the cats not to leave food out either.

Plan to trap so that you don't have to keep the cat too long before surgery. Trapping the night before is usually the best approach. Adult cats should not eat 12 hours prior to surgery. Water should be available if the cat is held in the trap for more than 4 hours after capture.

Prepare the area where you will be holding the cats before and after the clinic. A garage or other sheltered, warm, protected area is best. Lay down newspapers to catch the inevitable stool, urine and food residue. You may want to use pieces of wood or bricks to elevate the traps off the newspapers. This allows the mess to fall through the wire away from the cats. Spraying the area ahead of time with a cat-safe flea spray (like Adams or Ovitrol) will discourage ants.

Prepare the vehicle you will use to transport them as well. Plastic may be an additional precaution. But remember that you will need to use newspapers, towels or pee pads. (Urine will roll right off of the plastic and that isn't what you want.)

Plan your day of trapping carefully. Remember that if you trap an animal and release it for some reason, it is unlikely that you will be able to catch it again... they learn very quickly. If there are young kittens involved, remember that they should not be weaned from the mother before 4-6 weeks of age. If you are trapping a lactating female, you may want to wait until you have located the kittens and they are old enough to wean. If you wish to tame and foster the kittens to adopt out, they should be taken from the mother at 4-6 weeks. If you wait until the kittens are older than 4-6 weeks before trying to tame them you will find the job progressively harder with age.

**Always remove soiled liners promptly.**

## Setting the traps:

Plan to set traps just before or at the cats' normal feeding time. This is often at night. Dusk is usually the best time to set traps. Don't trap in the rain or the heat of the day without adequate protection for the trap. Cats are vulnerable in the traps and could drown during storms or suffer from heatstroke in the sun. Use common sense! **Make sure to securely latch the rear door, if equipped.**

Plan placement of traps on a level surface in the area where the cats usually feed or have been seen. Cats are less likely to enter the trap if it wobbles. If trapping in a public area, try to place traps where they will not be notice by

passersby (who may not understand that you are not trying to harm the cat). Bushes are often places where cats hide and provide good camouflage for the trap.

Use smelly food to bait the trap. We find that canned mackerel is very effective and relatively inexpensive. It is best not to put any bowls inside the trap to hold food since the animal can easily hurt itself on it in a panic or while recovering from the anesthetic. Spoon a small amount of food onto the soaked newspaper scrap and place the trap on top of the food so the food is as far back in the trap as possible while still not accessible from outside the trap. (You want the cat to go all the way into the trap to avoid being injured when the trap door closes.) Press the trap down onto the food so that it squishes up through the wire. The idea is to make the food a little hard to get so that the cat has to go into the trap as far as possible and has to work at getting it long enough to trip the trap. (Some cats are very good at getting in and out of traps without getting caught. We don't want to make it too easy for them to get away with that trick. Also, having the food essentially outside of the trap prevents the cat from eating it in the trap before surgery and is less messy.)

After baiting the trap, open the trap door by pushing the top of the door in and pulling the bottom of the door upward. There is a small hook attached to the right side of the trap top. It hooks onto a tiny metal cylinder on the right side of the door. The hook holds the door in an open position which also raises the trip plate. When the cat steps on the plate it will cause the hook to release the door and close the trap.

After setting the trap, cover it with a large towel or piece of towel-sized material. Fold the material at the front end of the trap to expose the opening while still covering the top, sides, and back of the trap. The cover will help to camouflage the trap and serve to calm the cat after it is caught. Just before you are ready to leave the trap for the cat to enter, you may want to push the hook (ever so slightly) a little bit back off the cylinder to create a "hair trigger". (Don't get too carried away with this step or the trap will trip as soon as the cat takes a sniff!)

## Waiting for success:

**Never leave traps unattended**, but don't hang around within sight of the cat (or you will scare it off). The trapped animal is vulnerable. Passersby may release the cat or steal the trap! Wait quietly in an area where you can still see the traps without disturbing the cats. Check traps every 15 minutes or so. You can often hear the traps trip and see the cloth cover droop down slightly over the opening from a distance. As soon as the intended cat is trapped completely cover the trap and remove the trap from the area if other cats are not in sight. You may consider putting another trap in the same spot if it seems to be a "hot" one. Be sure to dispose of the food left on the ground when you pick up the trap. (You don't want to litter or give out any freebies and spoil any appetites!)

When you get the captured cat to a quiet area away from the other traps lift the cover and check for signs that you have the correct animal and not a pet or previously neutered feral. [Note: Operation Catnip clips the tip of the left ear to avoid repeat animals. This type of marking is the universally accepted symbol of a sterilized, vaccinated feral cat.] If you note that you have captured a lactating female check the area for kittens and remember that this female must be released 10-12 hours after surgery so she can care for and nurse her kittens. Cover the cat back up as soon as possible. Uncovered, the animal may panic and hurt itself thrashing around in the trap.

Of course, there is always the chance that you will catch some other wild animal attracted to the food or an unintended cat. Simply release the animal quietly as stated in the releasing procedures here.

## Holding procedures:

[Note: If a cat does not seem to be recovering well from surgery during the first 72 hours after an Operation Catnip Clinic, then please call the Emergency number from the Clinic Discharge Instructions. After that, you may want to call your vet if you have any concerns.] 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. In all likelihood, area cats will drive it away. If the veterinarian has indicated a serious medical problem with the cat which you will not be able to treat, you, with the advice of the vet, must make the decision on whether it is safe to release the animal or kinder to euthanize it. Untreated abscesses, respiratory infections, and a number of other conditions

can mean suffering and a slow death. 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. A trapped skunk or possum, which is nocturnal, may decide to sleep in the trap all day and not leave the trap until dark. After releasing the cat, hose off traps and disinfect them with bleach. Never store traps in the “set” position (door open); animals may wander into un-baited traps and starve to death.

## Helpful hints:

- Bring a flashlight with you if trapping at night. It will come in handy for checking traps from a distance and might help you avoid a twisted ankle in the dark.
- Bring a cap for the top of the mackerel can. Nothing smells worse than fish juice spilled in the car. Don't forget a spoon!
- Females with kittens will be attracted by the sound of their kittens if the previously captured kittens are placed in a covered carrier just behind the trap. Similarly, kittens will be easier to trap if the previously captured mom is in the carrier.
- Females in heat can be placed in a carrier to attract male cats that have been eluding the traps. Never place the “bait” animal in the trap or anywhere where it may be harmed by the trapped animal. Even moms can hurt their babies if frightened enough. Be careful not to let the “bait” animal escape.
- Some kittens can be caught without a trap but are still too wild to be handled easily. Use a thick towel to pick up the kitten to help protect you from scratching and biting. This also helps prevent the kitten from squirming away from you.
- Kittens under 6 months of age can't go very long without food. After you have trapped a young kitten, be sure to feed it in the trap the day and night before surgery, then remove the food first thing in the morning.
- Rotisserie chicken, Bojangle's chicken, and KFC are all good bait for a hard to catch cat.
- If you trapped an ear-tipped cat, consider bringing the cat in for revaccination (that does not involve anesthesia).
- If you have Facebook, feel free to search for TNVR Trappers. That is a group of caretakers and volunteers that can help answer your questions and give more detailed tips for a specific situation.

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