

EVERYTHING BUT THE KITCHEN SINK!

RESOURCES, TIPS, TRICKS and ADVICE for TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return)

This page is designed to help you learn about and prepare to do TNR and to help you tackle common issues that you might see while implementing a TNR program for your community cats.

Whether you're looking for a step-by-step guide to TNR or you could use some of our field-tested tips and tricks, you should be able to find it all here.



NEED A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO TNR or COMMUNITY CAT DAILY CARE?

[Alley Cat Allies](#) is the country's preeminent feral/community cat advocacy organization. Alley Cat Allies will walk you through the [entire trapping process](#) and they have great information on [working with neighbors](#) and alleviating concerns about community cats. Join their [Feral Friends Network](#) to obtain a list of TNR-friendly organizations and individuals near you.

[Best Friends Animal Society](#) offers a wide range of resources and information about TNR and community cats. From their step-by-step [guide to humane trapping](#) and their [comprehensive trapping protocols](#), to their guide for [managing a colony](#) and their [Community Cats Program Handbook](#), you'll find everything you need for effective TNR and community cat care.

NEED HELP WITH TNR LEGISLATION or POLICY in YOUR COMMUNITY?

[For All Animals'](#) "Attorney-At-Paw" program offers guidance to community cat advocates to empower them to change laws and shelter policy in their communities.



NEED A TRAP?

You might see the TNR traps referred to as "live traps," "humane traps," or "box traps." The traps you are looking for are long and rectangular, with a trap door at one end and an easy-release, rear door on the other end.

When evaluating your trap options, always look for traps that have the “easy-release door” or “rear door.” This facilitates care and feeding of the cat before and after surgery, and makes releasing the cat much easier. Also try to get a trap divider (aka: “feral fork” or “catacomb”) to help you care for the cat before and after surgery.

*RENTING TRAPS:

Many TNR-friendly shelters, spay/neuter clinics and TNR-specific organizations lend or rent humane traps for TNR. Ask around in your area or join the Alley Cat Allies [Feral Friends Network](#) to obtain a list of TNR-friendly organizations near you.

*PURCHASING TRAPS:

If you’d rather have the flexibility of owning your own trap(s), you can purchase great traps and trap dividers (aka: “feral forks” or “catacombs”) from several places.

Some trap manufacturers are:

[Tru-Catch](#): Check out the “Light Duty 30-LTD” trap, which works for most cat applications, or the 36-D, which gives cats more space. Don’t forget the “TD-2” trap divider. <http://www.trucatchtraps.com>

[Tomahawk Live Trap](#): Check out their “Feral Cat” line of traps and their drop traps (drop traps are useful for trap-savvy/hard-to-catch cats). Note: These traps are noisier when they are tripped (ie: when the trap door shuts) than some other brands, and they aren’t powder-coated to help protect from rust/reduce sharp edges. You can get powder coating for a small fee. <http://www.livetraps.com>

HOW DOES THIS THING WORK?

If this is your first TNR adventure, we want you to know that we’ve all been right where you probably are: feeling nervous, possibly overwhelmed, or maybe perplexed (or even a combination of all three!).

But we’re here to tell you it’s OK! TNR is exciting, rewarding and even, dare we say, fun! It just takes patience, a willingness to learn a few new things, and a desire to help cats. 😊

We partnered with our feline friends, Cole and Marmalade, to create a [video](#) that shows you just how to set your trap and will help you to get comfortable with some TNR basics.

And you can find more in-depth, step-by-step TNR instructions [here](#).

PRACTICING WITH YOUR TRAP

Before you start trapping, you will want to make sure you are familiar with your trap and know how to bait and set it with ease. Everything should be as smooth and as calm as possible on trapping day, and this extends to setting the trap.

Becoming familiar with your trap should be done INDOORS, away from the cats you are trying to trap. When you are actually out there trying to trap, you don’t want to be fumbling with the trip plate or making lots of noise with the doors as you bait the trap. Practice makes perfect!

Check all of the moving parts of the trap to make sure they aren’t sticky, and check the doors to make sure they are closing and locking properly.

TIP: If it is possible, try to have as many traps as you have cats in order to complete TNR of your colony as quickly as possible.

Also, before (and after) each use, make sure your trap is clean and in good working order.

TIP: Set and bait your trap on level ground, away from any objects that could prevent the trap door from closing all the way. If you *have* to trap on grass or dirt, choose a spot that is as flat as possible and, as soon as the cat is trapped and covered, move the trap to level ground. Upset cats can easily flip a trap over on uneven ground, and flipped traps usually lead to escaped cats.



To test the trap's trip plate mechanism:

- Set the trap
- Utilizing the easy-release door for access, use your hand to apply light pressure (approximately the pressure of a cat's front paws) on the trip plate.
- The trap door should close when you apply this pressure.
- If the trap doesn't close, try adjusting the placement of the trap door against the metal piece (trigger bar) that holds the trap door open.
- Setting it back too far (the door will be at too high of an angle to the ground) can make the trap more difficult to spring; setting it too far forward (the door will be at too low of an angle to the ground) can make the trap spring just from a light touch on the trap door itself. You want to find a happy medium, where the trap door is just about parallel to the ground.

WHAT WOULD POSSIBLY MAKE A CAT GO IN THIS TRAP?

THE WAY TO A TRAPPED CAT IS THROUGH HIS STOMACH

The right food can be the biggest key to effective trapping. Most cats will respond very well to “stinky,” high value food such as:

- tuna
- sardines
- strong-smelling canned food

While there's no “guaranteed-to-work” food, in most cases the smellier the food the better for attracting hungry cats. 😊



TIP: Some cats will be nervous and potentially trap-shy if the food presented in the trap is different than the food they are used to getting. If they don't like the stinky food you offer, try your usual food instead.

TWO TRADITIONAL WAYS TO USE FOOD:

Option 1:

Withhold food for 24 hours: Hungry cats make easier-to-trap cats! :)

This is a great option in general and especially when time is of the essence.

Provide water at all times, but withhold food for 24 hours. Then set your traps with high value food. Put a trail of a few pieces of high-value food along the trap floor to entice them to the larger meal at the back of the trap. Place the larger meal on a small paper plate (or a piece of a paper plate) that won't block the trap's trip plate.

TIP: Whenever possible, get your cats on a feeding schedule before you start trapping. And make sure you are communicating with anyone who normally feeds the cats.

IMPORTANT: Don't trap in extreme temperatures (hot or cold) unless there is an emergency situation and you take proper precautions for the cat's safety. A good rule of thumb: If the temperature is not comfortable for you to be out and about, it's not comfortable for them. PS: We don't recommend withholding food in cold weather, when cats really need to eat in order to stay warm and safe.

Option 2:

Get them used to eating in un-set traps: Confident cats make easier-to-trap cats! ☺

This technique is a great way to make it more likely that you'll actually be able to trap all of your cats, all at once, for a set appointment date. And even if you don't trap them all at one time, the likelihood is that you will trap a very large percentage of them. It's also a good technique to use in colder weather or when time is not of the essence.

Feed out of un-set, tied-open traps for one-to-two weeks. Then, when the time comes for the surgery appointment, the cats should be totally acclimated to the traps and should go right into set traps without any stress. A bonus is that you should be able to use the cats' normal food for most of the duration of the process (you definitely don't want to feed just tuna or sardines for an extended period of time).

For this technique, you need to work in stages, and you will need one trap per cat if trying to catch all cats at once. A Tru-Catch trap would be the preferred trap to use for this technique, as the doors are easy to tie open.

TIP for Option 2: If your cats don't typically eat on paper plates, sometimes it's good to switch to paper at the start of the trap "training" time so the paper plate doesn't confuse them in on the day the trap is set. Some cats are persnickety about their dishware! ;)

First, tie the trap door open, so the trap door is roughly parallel to the ground. Zip ties or strong twine are excellent for securely holding the trap door in the open position. Slowly move the food into the trap over a one-to-two week period, gauging their comfort level each day:

- Start outside of the trap, a couple of feet away, using the same kind of paper plates you will be using on trapping day
- Each day, move the food a bit closer to the trap, until the food is next to the trap door and then under the trap door
- (Don't be surprised if the cats start to *really* investigate the trap door at this point!)
- Next, start feeding in the front part of the trap
- Then half way back in the trap
- And finally, all the way back in the trap



Once they are used to going into the back of the traps for food, continue feeding in the back of the traps every day. On the day before their surgery appointments, quietly snip the zip tie or twine, set the traps and put the food in the back of the traps as usual. They should walk right in and the traps will spring closed behind them. Some cats don't even realize they are trapped until they finish their meal!

TIP: Use zip ties to secure the doors of a closed trap. Trap doors and easy-release doors can open if a trap rolls over during transport (or if a cat is particularly active in his trap), so using a zip tie on each door can keep the trap more secure. You can easily remove the zip ties with a pair of scissors for feeding and for releasing your cat.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TRAP COVERS

Covering a trapped cat's trap is ESSENTIAL to helping to keep cats calm during the TNR process. Use lightweight material in warm weather; use heavier material (or extra layers) in cold weather. Make sure to leave a space for fresh air to come in. Be waiting in the wings with your towel or sheet to cover the trap as soon as it closes.

TIP: Trying to carry a covered trap can be difficult if you don't have easy access to the trap handle(s). To make an easy-to-use trap cover out of a bath towel, fold the towel in half widthwise and use sharp scissors to cut a lengthwise opening (a few inches long) in the middle of the fold. Unfold the towel and place it over the trap, with the trap handle sticking through the opening you just cut. Now you have access to the handles and the cat can stay covered. Easy-peasy.

LABELS and RECORDS

It's very important to label your traps with your name and the cat's name (or an ID number) before going to the clinic for spay/neuter. You can use all sorts of methods, such as attaching a cardstock shipping tag to the trap handle with a rubber band, or using masking tape to make quick and simple labels to affix to the metal plate on the top of the trap. Use a Sharpie or other easy-to-see marker on your tag/label. You should always keep a record of who/where/when you are trapping, along with a brief description of each cat, and make sure your list corresponds to your trap labels before you go to the clinic. Keep all veterinary records in a safe place. Take a look at this great [colony tracking system](#) from Alley Cat Allies.



KEEPING THE TRAP IN YOUR CONTROL

Never leave your traps unattended!

Stay out of the eyeline of the cat if seeing you will spook him, but stay close enough that you can either see or hear the trap closing. Even if you have to sit 50 feet away, watching from your car in order to give the cat confidence to approach the trap, do not leave that trap alone. Between the safety of the cat and the security of your traps, you don't want to let them out of your control.

TIP: Mirror, Mirror

If you are in an area where it's kind of noisy and you won't be able to hear the trap close (or if there isn't a good spot to stay hidden but maintain visual/audio contact with the trap), try using a small hand mirror to help you watch the trap from around a corner. You can stay hidden behind, say, the side of a building, but can also see the trap from your position. Not foolproof (sometimes the cat will still see your movement), but it has definitely been successful for many a trapping day in noisy urban areas or on busy farms.

PREP YOUR PRE-OP and RECOVERY ROOM (and your vehicle) BEFORE YOU START TRAPPING

You don't want to be scrambling to set up a space for your trapped cat after you've trapped him. Choose your pre-op/recovery space and set it up ahead of time. Pick a secure, indoor spot that is quiet and not too cold/not too hot. When you are in this space with your trapped cat, keep noise to a minimum.

KEEPING YOUR RECOVERY ROOM AND CAR CLEAN IS A SNAP

TARPS:

Purchase two inexpensive plastic tarps (like a cheap shower curtain or painter's tarp): one for the back seat of your car (or wherever you will be placing the traps for transport to the clinic) and one for the room where you will hold the cat in the trap before and after surgery. Put the tarp down on the floor or backseat (secure to the floor with painter's tape or masking tape if desired).

PUPPY PADS OR OLD TOWELS:

Put a couple of old towels (or a few puppy pads) on top of the tarp. Then put the trap containing your cat on top of the towels/puppy pads that are on the tarp. The tarp helps to protect your floors and upholstery, and the towel or puppy pads soak up any mess the cat might happen to make (such as when the cat urinates). In the recovery room, when the towel is soiled, simply lift up the trap, switch out the soiled towel with a clean one, and re-place the trap on the new towel.

TRAP COVER:

And of course you will *always* keep the trap covered with a towel or sheet, so even if the cat were to spray

straight out, the urine will hit the sheet covering the trap. Thus, your floors and upholstery stay nice and clean and any smell that might be caused by the cat will dissipate as soon as you remove the towels and air out the room/car.

FOOD AND WATER IN THE TRAP: NO FANCY CHINA NEEDED

You can use empty, rinsed out cat food cans for water and paper plates for wet food during recovery. These take up very little space in the trap and allow the cat to eat and drink during the 24-48 hour recovery period if he/she chooses to do so (not all cats will eat or drink while in a trap). Some cats will decide to take their food and shove it... or pull it, along with their water, and make a big mess. No worries. That's what your towels/puppy pads and tarp are for!

USING A TRAP DIVIDER

To place or remove food/water, you need access to the inside of the trap. But how to get access without the cat escaping or you getting hurt? A trap divider ("feral fork," "catacomb") is the tool for the job. Please note that this isn't a totally foolproof tool and a cat *can* get past it if it isn't used properly.

TIP: A good way to encourage a cat to move to one side of the trap is to pull the trap cover (towel or sheet) back so that half of the trap is uncovered. This encourages the cat to move to the covered side where she feels safer.

To remove or place food/water, the cat needs to be in the opposite end of the trap from where you want to work. This then allows you to take your trap divider and place it in the trap from above, with the tines of the "fork" resting in the holes of the floor of the trap. You want to make sure you angle the divider back and down towards the cat. This position helps hold it in place. For additional security, you can insert a second trap divider horizontally across the trap, so that the ends of the tines are secured by both walls of the trap.

Once the divider is securely positioned you can open the trap door (only as much as necessary), and then slide in your food and water... Do not reach too far back into the trap. You don't want the cat to be able to swat you through the tines of the trap divider.

If you do not have a trap divider: When it comes to changing the food and water it can be difficult if you don't have a trap divider... but it's not impossible. Most feral cats are going to be so scared that they will stay in the back of the trap on their own if you have coaxed them to the far side by moving your trap cover. But you should always use your best judgement when deciding how often to switch the food and water out... If in doubt, ask the veterinary clinic for advice. You can still use the empty cat food container and paper plate to slide water and food into the trap through the easy-release door if you open it a VERY small amount... You can reduce the number of times you open the trap by using a shallow dish half filled with wet food with extra water added. DO NOT just stick your hands into the trap, though. These cats are scared and will likely strike out at you.

TIP: Place food and water in the "easy-release" side of the trap, just next to the inside of the door. You don't have to lift the door much at all in order to slide food/water into the trap. There's no guarantee the cat won't do a little re-arranging of things for you, but the easiest access point is always going to be your easy-release door.

HANDLING A FERAL CAT: JUST SAY “NO”



Never, ever try to pet or grab a cat in a trap. *Even* if you think it's a really cute cat, or even if you think she seems calm and nice, or even if you think the 10 week old kitten couldn't possibly hurt you.

There are serious, potentially life-threatening risks for both you AND the cat if the cat bites you, and you do NOT want to have to face the consequences.

There will be time to assess the temperament of the cat after surgery and release. Now is not the time.

Some cats will make it very obvious after surgery and before release that they are friendly, but if you had to trap the cat in order to get it to a vet, you have to operate on the assumption that the cat is “feral until proven friendly.” And remember, even friendly cats can get very upset and scared when confined. Do. Not. Risk. It.

OPENING A TRAP CONTAINING A JUST-TRAPPED CAT: “NO”

It might be tempting to open a trap to check on a cat who is being very vocal, is thrashing around, or seems scared, but DON'T DO IT. You can quickly lift a corner of the trap cover to check on him if you are worried, but know that in almost all cases it is better to let the cat calm down in a quiet space, with the trap cover in place.

Other than carefully opening the door a tiny bit (as described above) to place or remove food/water (with a trap divider firmly in place), do NOT open a trap once a cat has gone in. The next people to really open the trap at this point should be the staff at the spay/neuter clinic.

If a trapped cat is experiencing a medical emergency do NOT attempt to remove the cat yourself. Immediately take the cat in the trap to your clinic or your nearest veterinary emergency hospital.

TRANSFERING A CAT FROM A TRAP TO A CARRIER OR KENNEL: “NO.”

Do NOT try to transfer a cat from a trap to a regular cat carrier or a kennel during routine TNR. Bring the cat to the clinic in her trap. After surgery, you will recover the cat in her trap.

It may *seem* like moving a feral cat from the relatively small space of the trap to a large carrier or a kennel is a nice thing to do for the cat, but in fact, you could be putting the cat (and yourself) in danger. Here's why:

- Carriers and kennels do not offer a tight seal against a trap's door, and successful escape attempts are very likely.
- After surgery, it is important for any cat (feral or not) to have restricted activity (preferably no running, jumping, climbing, or rough play). This helps the healing process, helps to prevent injury, helps to avoid post-surgical complications, and helps to maintain the integrity of any sutures the cat may have.
- Feral cats are going to be scared or even terrified about being trapped. This may cause them to thrash



around in an attempt to get out of their enclosure. So, the more space the cat has to thrash, climb, etc., the more likely the cat is to injure herself. That makes a trap a safer place for recovery than a kennel or carrier.

- In addition, it is not safe for you (and by extension, the cat) to try to change food and water for a feral cat in a cage/kennel. Without a way to keep the cat separated from you (ie: you can't properly use a trap divider in a carrier or large kennel), there is a chance the cat will try to escape OR become very scared and injure you in self-defense.

TIP: Once cats have been in a trap, it is VERY hard (and sometimes impossible) to re-trap them later, so if faced with a very active cat who is tugging on your heartstrings, just cover the trap to calm the cat, place the trap in your pre-prepared room, and leave the cat extraction to the clinic.

TESTING FOR FIV or FeLV: NOT TYPICALLY NECESSARY

Unless a cat is showing signs of illness and/or you have real reason to suspect a cat is infected with Feline Immunodeficiency Virus or Feline Leukemia, you serve the cat better by skipping the FIV/FeLV testing and instead spending your money on more spay/neuter surgeries for other cats.

“Snap tests” done for FIV/FeLV are notorious for giving false positives, and there is a long history of cats being killed simply for showing up positive on one snap test.

Alley Cat Allies is against “standard procedure” FIV/FeLV testing. Read more about their [recommended testing protocols](#).

[Veterinary guidelines for TNR](#) (scroll down to “Skip the FeLV and FIV Test”)

To learn more about FIV/FeLV Testing, you can participate in this [webinar](#) offered by the Humane Society of the United States.

KITTENS BORN TO COMMUNITY CATS



If you have found kittens born to outdoor moms, either alone or in your existing colony, [Alley Cat Allies](#) has all the information you need to decide how best to approach the situation, including how to determine the age of kittens.

WORKING WITH NEIGHBORS WHO MIGHT BE UNHAPPY ABOUT THE CATS

Sometimes as you conduct TNR, you'll find that the cats might be considered a nuisance by one or more of your neighbors. If that is the case, take a look at these great guides for keeping the cats safe and your neighbors happy:



[Talking to neighbors](#) in a positive, productive way

[Humane deterrents](#) to keep cats off of neighbors' property

COLD WEATHER CARE FOR COMMUNITY CATS

Winter temperatures bring challenges to community cats. Help them out with a [little bit of shelter and special supplies](#).

WILDLIFE CONCERNS

Inevitably you will encounter wildlife such as opossums, raccoons and squirrels in your TNR travels. You might also hear (or have) concerns about community cats' impact on wildlife. To address these encounters and concerns, Alley Cat Allies has some [information to help](#).



Have a question about TNR that isn't covered on this page or in the links below? Let us know! Send an e-mail to info@jacksongalaxyfoundation.org