



Erie Animal Network Community Class

What is a feral cat?

TNR (Trap-Neuter- Return)

Providing Shelter

Basic Feral Caretaking

What is a feral cat?

Feral cats are the "wild" offspring of domestic cats and are primarily the result of pet owners' abandonment or failure to spay and neuter their animals, allowing them to breed uncontrolled. Feral cat "colonies" can be found behind shopping areas or businesses, in alleys, parks, abandoned buildings, and rural areas. They are elusive and do not trust humans.

Many people assume their animals will survive when they move away and leave them behind. Contrary to popular belief, domestic animals do not automatically return to their "natural" instincts and cannot fend for themselves!

Already, U.S. animal shelters are forced to kill millions of homeless cats and dogs annually. The alternative to humane euthanasia for almost every stray is a violent end or slow, painful death. Many "throwaways" die mercilessly outdoors from starvation, disease, abuse — or as food for a predator.

A pair of breeding cats, which can have two or more litters per year, can exponentially produce 420,000 offspring over a seven-year period.

What is TNR?

Studies have proven that trap-neuter-release is the single most successful method of stabilizing and maintaining healthy feral cat colonies. Spaying/neutering homeless cats:

- Stabilizes the population at manageable levels.
- Eliminates annoying behaviors associated with mating.
- Is humane to the animals and fosters compassion in the neighborhoods.
- Is more effective and less costly than repeated attempts at extermination: costs for repeatedly trapping and killing feral colonies are far higher than promoting stable, non-breeding colonies in the same location. Vacated areas are soon filled by other cats, who start the breeding process over again.

Providing Shelter

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING SHELTER: Carports, backyards, gazebos, garages, warehouses, basements with access, barns, storage rooms, tool sheds, laundry rooms, out-buildings, under houses, porches or other structures, abandoned buildings, abandoned houses, and many others.

PROVIDING OUTSIDE SHELTER: If you are providing shelter for your feral cats on your property, you will probably have more options and a safer place for them. But, the basics for warmth and protection from the elements with food protected and fresh water will be equally important. All cats living out of doors need a safe place to eat, sleep and rest. All outside shelter must be off the ground a few inches to keep the inside dry. Bricks, cement blocks, wooden boards, trellis or any materials that will raise it up off the ground can be used. You may be putting shelter on uneven ground, in bushes or other discrete areas where leveling of the surface may be necessary. If you are creating shelter in an existing space that is high off the ground, be sure the cats will be able to jump into the opening.

The following are instructions and helpful information for constructing outside shelters in a limited amount of space available under and around bushes: First, measure the area where the shelter is to be installed. Cut the existing branches, so it can be placed far back under the foliage. Do not cut too much until you are actually ready to put the shelter in place, as the brush can serve as support and concealment. If the shelter cannot be completely concealed, use plastic similar foliage, fastened to the shelters and existing bushes to blend into the surrounding landscape.

Example of a shelter for two: Purchase heavy duty plastic storage containers with lids. Sit them upright with the lid as the roof. If you turn them over with the lids on the bottom, extra measures must be taken to keep the rain from pooling around the inside of the lid and leaking into the sleeping area. Cut a hole 6 " x 6 " (even the chubbiest cat will fit - but most dogs won't) on one end or on the side of the container close to the corner, up 4-5 inches from the bottom.

This is very important, as it will keep the inside of the shelter dry.

When using plastic storage containers with one hole cut on the side, or the end, an awning must be made.

The heavy awning covering the opening and extending beyond the width of the shelter gives a certain amount of protection and safety. If there is a need for an additional escape hole do not cut holes directly across from each other, as it creates a draft.

Heating: Heating a shelter can prove to be a little more difficult than simply insulating the unit. If a source of electricity is available, you may consider a waterproof heating pad with chew resistant cord, or a porcelain light socket with a protective dome with a ceramic heating element - assuring enough overhead clearance to keep above the cat. It is important for the safety of the cat that the electricity source be a GFCI receptacle. If electricity is not available, microwaveable heating pads (such as Snuggle Safe brand) can be purchased and can provide 12 hours of warmth.

Insulating: Thought should be given to insulating a cat shelter. During the winter, cats become very vulnerable to the cold conditions. At the very least, straw (not hay) should be used and replaced every so often. Other options include polystyrene insulation. Never use towels, or blankets or any other cloth bedding. It will quickly freeze and render the shelter useless.

Basic Caretaking

Watering: During the winter, problems arise from water freezing. Heated water bowls can be purchased if electricity is readily available. Other options include, Pet Solar Sippers or placing water bowls inside a styrofoam cooler (large enough to house the water bowl and a cat) and cutting a whole large enough for the cat to enter. Note that water and food should not be placed inside the cat's shelter. Water bowls can spill and food may attract unwanted predators. The feeding site should be a separate station.

Feeding: While cats need the higher protein supplied by canned cat food, during the winter months, wet food can freeze, so make sure there is also plenty of dry food. To prevent ants from infesting the dishes, place food bowls in a (plant) saucer of water or encircle the outside of the food bowl with petroleum jelly. Ideally, food and water would be placed under shelter. A clear plastic tub turned upside down, with cat sized square openings cut on each end, or a small children's umbrella staked in the ground are some options.