

DO IT YOURSELF TRAP/NEUTER/RETURN

You will need the following equipment/supplies prior to beginning your TNR project:

Traps (Hundred Cat Foundation has a limited supply available for loan from our Trap Bank in Centre Hall, PA)

Trap Dividers (also may be available for loan)

Food (good smelly cat food tuna, salmon, sardines, chicken)

Trap Covers (torn sheets are fine)

Cinder blocks, bricks or similar items to hold traps off ground during holding and recovery periods or a cage (HCF may have one available for loan)

Newspapers

Before You Trap

1. Read the step-by-step instructions below. Understanding the process thoroughly before you trap is essential. Being prepared helps you anticipate potential problems and plan solutions ahead of time.
2. Understand ear-tipping... Cats that live outdoors that are being spayed or neutered should be ear-tipped so that they can be readily identified as having had their surgeries if they are caught in a trap at a later time. It is important that your veterinarian is aware of the need to ear-tip cats you bring in for spaying or neutering. HCF tips the right ear; Alley Cat Allies, the national organization promoting TNR, tips left ears. There is no correct side, but be prepared to check any animal trapped for an ear-tip to indicate that they have been previously neutered.
3. Find out if neighbors are also feeding the cats you wish to spay and neuter. This is a good opportunity to educate the community and let them know you are caring for the cats. If there are other people feeding the cats, talk to them about Trap-Neuter-Return and try to coordinate efforts, particularly when it comes to feeding, withholding food before trapping, and assessing the colony.
4. Feed on a schedule. Establish a routine time and place for feeding the cats every day for at least two weeks prior to trapping. Consider only feeding in the morning if at all possible so that trapping can be done during daylight hours. (Trapping at night invites nocturnal wildlife such as raccoons, opossums and skunks to the food in the traps; releasing them can be a challenge; the best way to avoid getting wildlife is to avoid the

dusk-to-dawn time periods.) Also, get the cats used to eating in a 30-minute period. Food should not be left out all of the time. The cats will quickly adapt to the feeding time and will come at that time each day. This is essential to making sure that they all come to eat when you plan to trap. Your trapping day will be most successful if the cats are used to seeing traps. You may want to begin feeding cats out of unset traps to gain their confidence. Remember to work with others who may be caring for the cats in order to coordinate feeding efforts, especially when withholding food and assessing the colony.

5. Assess the cats. Start a list noting each cat and kitten you see (color, size, age, sex, temperament). This will help you monitor the number of cats and their health, determine their approximate age, and help you determine the number of appointments and traps you will need. It will also help you identify if some cats friendly and may be candidates for adoption into homes. It will also help you to be prepared to foster kittens if some too young to be spayed/neutered are caught in traps. This is also important for ongoing colony care so you will know if any cats are missing or if any new cats join the colony that need to be neutered.

6. Contact various veterinarians to find out their prices and whether their practice will work with feral or semi-socialized cats.

7. Schedule the appointments. Line up clinic or veterinary appointments before you trap. If you might end up trapping a nursing mom cat, determine if the veterinarian will perform the surgery; if not, consider what your alternatives will be if you trap her. You don't want to successfully trap cats and then have nowhere to take them. Make appointments for the number of traps you have, though you may not catch a cat in every trap. Find out if the clinic or veterinarian is familiar with trapping and make sure they are prepared if the reservation isn't fulfilled completely. Ask them what number of cats they can spay and neuter in a single day. Plan your trapping session so that the cats are transported to the veterinarian or clinic as soon as possible. Make appointments for the same or following day to keep cats' time in the traps at a minimum.

It is important to find a veterinarian or low-cost clinic familiar with or willing to learn how to work with feral cats. If the veterinarian you ultimately choose has no experience

with feral cats, he or she can learn more about treating feral cats from a variety of on-line sources.

8. Contact Centre County PAWS (237-8722) and request Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Vouchers (\$30 value per male, \$60.00 per female) for the number of cats you plan to spay or neuter
9. Determine the indoor location where you will be holding the trapped cats, both before transporting to the veterinarian and afterwards during their surgery recovery. The indoor location should be dry, temperature-controlled, quiet, and away from dangers such as toxic fumes, other animals, or people. It is important to remember that cats are very vulnerable when in traps!
10. Be prepared for specific scenarios that may occur during your trapping. If you trap a severely injured or sick cat, be prepared to get her to a veterinary clinic immediately. Even before you start trapping, have a contingency plan about where you will take the injured or sick cat, and be prepared for any associated financial costs. If you trap a nursing female—you can trap her without her kittens and get her back to them as soon as possible or you can trap her with her kittens and return the whole troop together. Prepare a full-service emergency veterinarian who can handle feral cats in case there is a complication that your selected veterinarian cannot address.
11. Although it is not necessary, you may want to consider securing help for the day-of, either through recruiting volunteers or asking a friend. Trapping by yourself, especially for your first time, can be overwhelming and exhausting. Having a companion is also a good safety precaution if you are trapping at night or in an unfamiliar area.
12. Gather all of the appropriate equipment. When trapping a colony, it is best to have at least one trap per cat. Alley Cat Allies suggests having more traps than cats, because you never know which locations will be most attractive to the cats or if a trap will malfunction.
13. Practice setting traps ahead of time. If you have never set a trap, doing it near the trap site on the day-of is not the best place to learn. Be as comfortable as possible with your equipment, for your own peace of mind and the cats' safety. Lift the metal

tab on top of trap. Hold ring at bottom of trap door and push top in while lifting door. Hold open (set trap) by bringing hook on top forward.

14. Pay attention to the weather. Never trap in extreme temperatures, hot or cold. They are dangerous conditions for cats to be in without food and exposed to the elements.

15. Withhold food. You must withhold all food from the cats you intend to trap 24 hours before trapping to ensure the cats are hungry enough to enter the traps. This includes treats! Also, surgery will be safer for the cats if they have not eaten for at least 12 hours. Remember, you are doing what is best for the cats. Always continue to provide the cats with clean, fresh drinking water.

Trapping

16. 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. 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 (½ 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.

17. 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 everytime 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.

18 Keep track of the traps at all times. Traps should never be left unattended. Check the traps frequently from a distance.

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.)

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.

19 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 several cats are 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 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 area.. Re-bait any traps that have had the bait eaten but have not sprung.

20. 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—mastered the art of removing food without triggering the trap. Don't be discouraged.

21. Take the cats to a veterinarian or a spay/neuter clinic. You should have already made appointments for sterilization and rabies vaccination before beginning to trap. Confirm that only dissolvable sutures will be used, eliminating the need for a follow-up visit to remove stitches. Remind the veterinarian to ear-tip the cats so they can be readily identified as spayed or neutered if they get trapped in the future. .

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.)

25. 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.

Post-Surgery

26 After surgery, allow the cat to recover in the same trap or in cages. If using traps, place the traps on top of cinder blocks, or bricks, and place newspapers on the floor under the traps so that waste will fall through the trap floor. This should be indoors in a dry, temperature-controlled environment, and away from loud noises or dangers such as toxic fumes, other animals, or people.. When the cats are recovering from anesthesia they are unable to regulate their body temperature. It is important that the recovery location is temperature-controlled to keep the cats from getting too hot or too cold. A basement or bathroom will usually do the trick.

27 Put your safety first. Keep the traps covered to reduce the cats' stress. Never open the trap doors or allow the cats out of the trap. Do not stick your fingers through the bars or attempt to handle the cats.

28 Monitor the cats. Check the cats often for their progress; keep an eye out for bleeding, infection, illness, and lack of appetite. If a cat is vomiting, bleeding, having difficulty breathing, or not waking up, get veterinary assistance immediately. Ask the clinic before the surgery how to reach them if there are surgical complications. If a cat is vomiting while still unconscious, her head should be turned to avoid choking. Sometimes this can be achieved by gently tipping the trap to no more than a 30 degree angle to change the cat's position. Be careful when tipping the trap so that you don't harm the cat by jostling her too much.

29. Feed and provide the cats with water after they regain consciousness. Wait eight hours after surgery before feeding adult cats. Kittens should be fed shortly after waking from anesthesia. When feeding the cats, lift the back door of the trap very slowly and allow only a small gap – one-half to one inch at most - to open. Slide a plastic lid with a little

bit of food on it through the gap without putting your hand inside the trap. You may want to purchase or borrow a device called an “isolator” or “trap divider” for this purpose. An isolator can be very helpful, especially if you have a trap that does not have a back door. Always relock the trap door. (If you don’t have an isolator device to keep the cat in the back of the trap, and you feel you cannot even slide a plastic lid in without the cat trying to escape, then don’t feed them.)

30 Hold cats until they recover. Male cats usually need to be held for 24 hours after surgery, depending on recovery speed. Females should be held for 48-72 hours if possible, and can be returned to their trap site as long as they are fully recovered and do not require further medical attention. You may return nursing mothers as soon as possible, once they completely regain consciousness so they can get back to their kittens. Make sure all cats are fully conscious, clear-eyed, and alert before release. If a cat need further care (longer than 72 hours), you will need to transfer her to a cage..

31 Return the cats. Release the cat in the same place you trapped him or her. Open the front door of the trap and pull back the cover. Or, if the trap has a rear door, pull the cover away from the back door, pull that door up and off, then completely remove the cover and walk away. Do not be concerned if the cat hesitates a few moments before leaving. She is simply reorienting herself to her surroundings. It is not uncommon for a cat to “disappear” for a few days after she is returned. She will appear eventually. Resume the feeding schedule and continue to provide food and water—she may eat when you are not around.

32 Thoroughly clean the traps with a nontoxic disinfectant when the returning is complete. Whether the traps are borrowed or your own, they should be cleaned before they are stored. Then they will be ready for the next trapping adventure. Even traps that appear clean must be disinfected—the scent of the cat previously trapped may deter other cats from entering.

33 Trap the remaining members of the colony if necessary, after a short break of a week or two, and complete the colony’s Trap-Neuter-Return effort. Be prepared for the fact that you may re-trap cats that are already eartipped. If you do, it is sometimes best to hold that cat in the covered trap until the cats you are aiming for have been trapped.