



ANIMAL WELFARE SPAY/NEUTER CLINIC

1729 Willey Ave, Cleveland OH 44113 216.771.4616

How to Humanely Trap Feral Cats for TNR

1. **Schedule a spay/neuter appointment *before* trapping the cat(s).** It's stressful for feral cats to be trapped & unfair to keep them confined any longer than necessary, so unless you are working with a clinic that accepts feral cats on a walk-in basis, make sure you've got the spay/neuter appointment lined up *before* you trap. Keep in mind that many of the low-cost veterinary clinics will have spay/neuter appointments booked for up to a month in advance, so be sure to plan ahead.
2. **Get your supplies ready.** You will need:
 - Traps--one for each cat. Humane traps, sometimes called "Hava-hart" traps, may be purchased for about \$50 at hardware stores, feed stores, or on-line (ACES has a great selection). Many animal shelters, like the Cleveland APL, or animal control agencies will rent or loan traps for a deposit or small fee. For cats who are suspected to be "trap-shy", obtain your trap at least a full week before you need to trap to allow time for the cat to become comfortable with the trap (see "Troubleshooting Tips for Trap-Shy Cats", below).
 - Bait & a small dish. For best results, use wet food that smells very strong. Canned jack mackerel has a strong odor which most cats find irresistible, and you can find it in the canned meat section of the grocery store. Canned cat food may also be used. Rinsed jar lids work well as a "dish" to hold the small amount of bait you'll be using in the trap.
 - Newspapers. Place a thin lining of newspaper along the bottom of the trap to prevent instances of the cat entering the trap, reaching over the trigger plate to eat, and exiting the trap without getting captured. It's very frustrating when this happens & once the cat is full, you've lost your opportunity to trap her until she's hungry again. Disguising the trap floor & trigger plate with newspaper increases your chance of trapping successfully the first time around. A thin layer of newspapers also enhances the cat's comfort during confinement in the trap.
 - An old sheet or large towel. You must cover the trap with a sheet, large towel, or blanket once the cat is inside—this helps to calm the cat's sense of fear & alleviates the stress of feeling exposed once inside the trap. You may want to have another towel or blanket on-hand to line your car seat during transport to & from the vet.
3. **Skip a meal.** Your intended cat will enter the trap if he is hungry. Once you've determined *when* you are going to set the trap, withhold food from the cat the day before you trap. Cats tend to be hungrier when it's very cold outside, so in freezing weather, withholding food for a shorter period of time (12-16 hours) may be sufficient to get the job done.
4. **Trap the cats.** You'll want to trap the cats either the day before, or early on the morning of, the day of the spay/neuter appointment. If you don't have much experience trapping, or if the cats aren't typically around early in the morning, you should set the traps the day before the appointment. Plan to keep the trapped cats somewhere quiet, comfortable, dry, and sheltered (a garage or basement may work well) before the appointment.

Tips for successful trapping:

- Prepare the traps in a location *away* from where you actually plan to set them (perhaps in your basement, garage, or home), to avoid spooking the cats. Make sure there is no other food available to the cats, except the bait inside the traps.

- Once the traps are lined & baited, carry them as quietly and *casually* as possible to the feeding site where you plan to trap. Place them down gently on an even surface so they won't tip or rock. Position the traps so that the cats don't have to turn their backs on a busy or high-traffic area to go inside—feral cats are nervous creatures and they'll want to be able to keep one eye on things as they enter the trap.
 - Set the traps and walk away. Try to keep everything as otherwise normal as possible—don't hang around and fuss or worry over the traps, simply leave. Go back inside your home or car, and watch quietly from a distance. *Never leave traps unsupervised, and never leave them open all night unattended!*
 - Watch for cats to go in the traps. Often cats will circle the traps or try to get at the bait from the back of the trap, before finally going in. This is normal & should be expected—don't interfere with the process. If you are trapping multiple cats and have more than one trap set, try not to make an appearance until all the traps are full. Cats may get spooked once they realize they are trapped—if you observe a cat thrashing around inside a trap, move quickly and quietly as possible to cover the trap completely with a sheet or large towel, and remove that cat to a waiting area away from the feeding site so the other cats will return. For your safety and for the cat's comfort, always cover the trap first before picking it up, and use the handles to carry it.
 - Most cats will thrash or try to escape as you approach them in the traps, but they will settle down & get quiet shortly after you cover the trap with a sheet. Do not stick your fingers inside the traps or try to touch the cats at all!
5. **Keep the cats safe & quiet until the spay/neuter appointment.** Once you have trapped the cats, remove them to the designated holding area until it's time to transport them to the vet. Remember, the area where you hold them should be dry, sheltered, and of a comfortable temperature (often a garage or basement will work nicely). To minimize stress on the cats, make sure the traps remain covered at all times, and keep the area quiet as possible. The cat holding area should be designated "off limits" to everyone--no children, dogs, other animals or people allowed to enter. For safety and to prevent escapes, keep the cats confined inside the covered traps- do not try to transfer them into carriers or other cages! If you notice serious illness or injury to any of the cats you've trapped, get the animal to an emergency vet right away for care, or surrender the cat to an animal shelter for emergency care or euthanasia, as appropriate.

Trouble-shooting tips for TNR of especially trap-shy cats

- Clean your traps thoroughly by hosing them down & scrubbing with water & vinegar to remove all odors. Some cats may be frightened or offended by the odors "stuck" to the traps.
- Tie the trap open for several days & acclimate cat to the trap by feeding her nearby, then gradually inside, the opened trap. Make the trap part of the normal feeding routine for the cat(s).
- Experiment with different baits. Fresh fried chicken (from a fast food restaurant) works like a charm *if* you can get it straight from the box to the trap, still steaming hot, AND the cat is nearby to smell it.
- Eliminate other food sources. Trap-shy cats have no incentive to enter the trap if there's another source of food available to them. If the bait is the **ONLY** food source, the trapping will work! If it's possible, entice the cat into an enclosed area (basement, garage, shed) where you can maintain total control over the food source. If confining the cat isn't possible, enlist the support of your neighbors for your TNR efforts & ask them not to give the cat access to food while you are trying to trap.
- Keep in mind that if you have several cats in a group you are trying to help through your TNR efforts, it may take you several hours, or multiple trapping sessions, to capture all the cats. The process of trapping & spaying or neutering them all will require patience and persistence.

For more information on TNR or humane trapping of feral cats, please contact Marta Anderson, the TNR Services Coordinator for the Cleveland APL, at 216-377-1624.