



A Step-by-Step Guide to  
**Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)**



A COMMUNITY CAT  
in Maryland

**HOW TO HELP COMMUNITY CATS**

# About Alley Cat Allies

Alley Cat Allies believes every cat deserves to live out his or her life to the fullest.

Founded in 1990, Alley Cat Allies is the leading advocacy organization for cats with a mission to transform and develop communities to protect and improve the lives of all cats and kittens. Together with our over 1.5 million supporters, we work toward a world where cats are valued and every community has humane and effective programs and policies to defend them.

Through our fearless advocacy, humane care, education and outreach, and law and policy activism, we equip and mobilize citizens, advocates, grassroots groups, shelters, veterinary professionals, and elected officials across the United States and around the world to improve their communities for cats through nonlethal, evidence-based approaches.

Visit our website at [alleycat.org](http://alleycat.org).

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**A teacher at the high school, your boss, the clerk at the grocery store—people all over the country, from all walks of life, care for outdoor cats every day. Like them, you’ve discovered cats in your community, and you want to help them.**

**The millions of cats who make their homes outdoors are called community cats, also known as feral cats.**

Community cats are domestic cats—the same species as pet cats. The difference is that community cats are unowned and generally not socialized to people, so they cannot be adopted. But community cats are not homeless. They have a home: the outdoors.

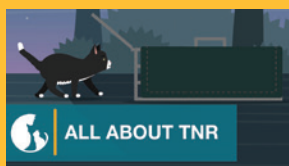
The best way to help community cats is through Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR). TNR ensures no new kittens are born, stabilizes cat populations, and improves cats’ lives. It also stops the behaviors and stresses associated with mating such as yowling, spraying, and fighting.

## What Is Trap-Neuter-Return?

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the only humane and effective approach to community cats, AKA unowned cats who live outdoors. Learn more at [alleycat.org/TNR](https://alleycat.org/TNR). Here are the basic steps to this lifesaving process:

- 1 Trap:** Humanely trap all the cats in a colony. A colony is a group of cats living outdoors together.
- 2 Neuter (or spay):** Take the cats in their traps to a veterinarian or clinic to be neutered, vaccinated, and eartipped (the universal symbol of a neutered and vaccinated cat. Learn more at [alleycat.org/Eartip](https://alleycat.org/Eartip)).
- 3 Return:** After the cats recover, return them to their outdoor home where they were trapped.

Watch videos of cats being returned and how to do Trap-Neuter-Return at [youtube.com/AlleyCatAllies](https://youtube.com/AlleyCatAllies).





## What NOT to do.

You may think calling animal control or taking a community cat to an animal shelter is the best way to help them. But, depending on your local policies, the opposite may be true. Since community cats are generally not socialized to people or adoptable, they are likely to be killed in shelters without the right humane programs.

The good news is that an increasing number of animal shelters are embracing TNR programs. That's why it is important to know YOUR local shelter's policies for community cats. Learn more at [alleycat.org/AnimalShelters](https://alleycat.org/AnimalShelters).

## This guide will help you help cats effectively and humanely.

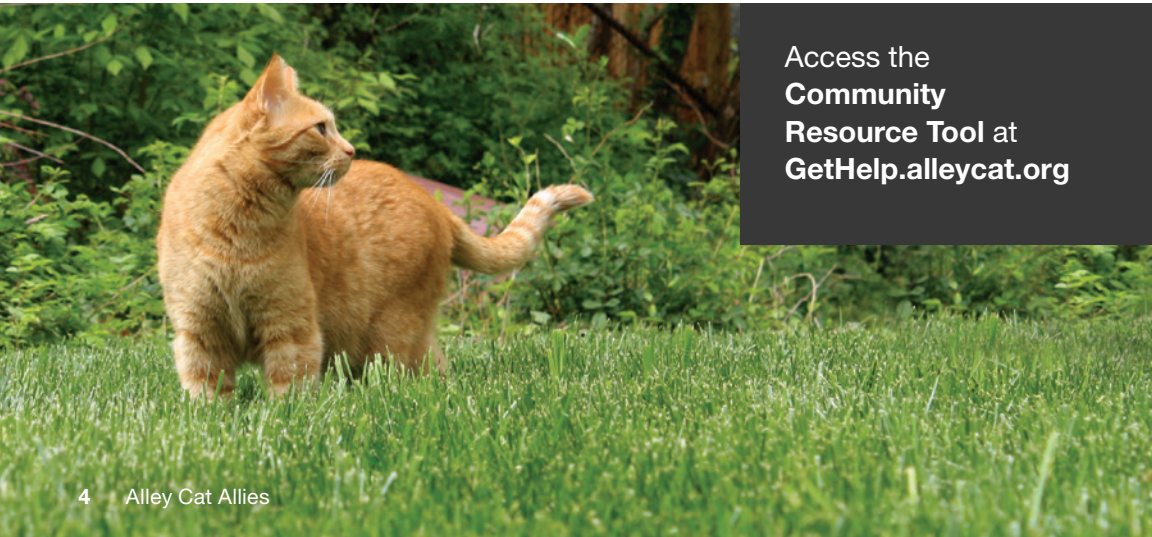
Since 1990, individuals, shelters, and organizations worldwide have looked to Alley Cat Allies for expertise in implementing TNR and educating communities about its benefits. This guide reflects the standards we've developed in our decades of powerful humane change.

With the information from this guide, you will have the power to protect the cats of your community and inspire and educate more people to become community cat advocates! Find our full, in-depth TNR guidelines at [alleycat.org/TNRGuide](https://alleycat.org/TNRGuide).

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### Alley Cat Allies Community Resource Tool™

Doing TNR requires connecting with the right resources near you! With our Community Resource Tool, you can discover local community cat-friendly veterinary clinics, low-cost veterinary care, fellow cat advocates, and so much more. It just takes a few clicks! Access the tool at [GetHelp.alleycat.org](https://GetHelp.alleycat.org).



Access the  
Community  
Resource Tool at  
[GetHelp.alleycat.org](https://GetHelp.alleycat.org)

# PLEASE READ BEFORE YOU START TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN:

## Never Leave Set Humane Traps Unattended

For the safety and well-being of the cats, DO NOT leave set humane traps behind if you have to leave for any reason, even if just for a few hours. Keep careful track of every trap you set and keep an eye on them from a distance throughout the trapping process.

Here are 5 reasons why:

### 1. Forgetting a trap could be deadly

Leaving set humane traps and walking away for hours increases the chance the traps could be forgotten. If cats enter the forgotten traps and are not discovered in time, they will not be able to free themselves and could suffer and die.

### 2. Covering the trap is critical to reduce cats' stress

As part of TNR best practice, a cat in a trap should be covered right away by a trap cover, towel, or blanket to calm the cat down and stop them from thrashing. If a trap is left unattended, a cat could go for hours without that feeling of security.

### 3. Trapped cats need to be moved to a temperature-controlled space

Cats can't easily warm or cool themselves when confined in a trap. Especially when the weather is hot or cold, trapped cats must be immediately moved to temperature-controlled environments to ensure their safety.

### 4. Traps could be stolen

Setting a trap and walking away increases the chance that your traps and other equipment could be taken. The best solution: always have eyes on your traps.

### 5. Cats are vulnerable when trapped

A cat cannot run away or defend herself while confined in a humane trap. Leaving a trap unattended increases the chance that a trapped cat is harmed by another animal, or that the trap is encountered by another person. The person could release the cat in the trap or, worse, harm the cat.

## Use Common Sense to Know When Not to Trap

It is possible for a cat to die from hypothermia, heat stroke, or other consequences of exposure when confined in a trap outdoors in extreme weather. A simple guideline— if it is too dangerous for you to be outside, then it is too dangerous for the cats to be sitting in a trap.

# STEP 1: Preparation for Trapping

## REMEMBER:

- **Only use a humane box trap or drop trap to trap a community cat.** *(Never use darts or tranquilizers.)*
- **Never attempt to pick up or handle a conscious community cat—even a kitten.** You risk injury to yourself and the cat. *(Caution: A cat with no vaccination record could be killed for rabies testing if a person is bitten!)*
- **Make plans and attempt to trap ALL cats and kittens during your first trapping session.** This is important because the more times cats are exposed to the trapping process, the more suspicious they become of traps.
- **Community cats are generally wary of people.** This fact should influence every choice you make when trapping. Cats often feel frightened and threatened when faced with a new experience, and being trapped and transported to a veterinarian can be overwhelming for them. This is also true for cats who normally are docile around their caregivers. Even pet cats can become nervous in new situations like this! Community cats cannot communicate their needs or if they are hurt or frightened. Instead, they may thrash about to try to escape their traps, or simply “shut down.” It is essential that you stay quiet, calm, and conscious of the cats’ well-being during your trapping ventures.
- **Every trapping effort is different.** Every colony location—whether a college campus, warehouse, farm, alley, small business parking lot, or other space—will have unique elements for you to consider. Use your discretion and common sense to determine any additional steps to those provided in this guide, and tailor the basics to fit your colony’s situation. For instance, you may need to work with college administrators, connect with other caregivers, or ensure you have enough traps and vehicles for a large colony.



But most importantly, **PLAN** before you set out to trap cats. Take time to feel comfortable and confident. Review all the TNR steps and scenarios in this booklet and online and create your own guide for your situation. **Having a solid plan will help you stay calm when trapping, which ensures that the cats stay as safe and stress-free as possible.** And remember: you're doing what is best for the cats. Keep in mind that carrying out TNR will significantly improve cats' lives. See a sample timeline for a Trap-Neuter-Return effort at [alleycat.org/TNRTimeline](https://alleycat.org/TNRTimeline).



## 1) Assess the Cats and Their Environment

- Consider leaving a note with your contact information if there are signs that the cats have other caregivers (for example: food, water bowls, or shelters in the area). Be clear in the note that you are there to help the cats, not to remove them. Once you've found any other caregivers in the area, coordinate your efforts. Their cooperation could be critical for your success.
- Communicate with residents near the colony location. Creating open lines for communication and education are vital parts of conducting TNR. People may have concerns because they are not aware that community cats live and thrive outdoors and that neutering improves their lives. They also may have problems with the cats that can easily be addressed. By introducing yourself as the person to contact for questions or concerns, you can prevent potential issues from escalating and endangering the cats. Learn more about helping cats and people coexist at [alleycat.org/CommunityRelations](https://alleycat.org/CommunityRelations).
- Use Alley Cat Allies' Community Cat Colony Tracking System ([alleycat.org/Tracking](https://alleycat.org/Tracking)) to record the number of cats in a colony and a brief description of each, including health status. Include photos of each cat, if possible.

**Tip:** Our outreach materials can help you talk to your neighbors about community cats and TNR. Find them at our online shop in English and Spanish: [alleycat.org/Shop](https://alleycat.org/Shop).





- Determine the cats' level of socialization. Community cats differ in how socialized, or friendly, they are to people. Socialized cats, like stray cats, are often more accustomed to and friendlier toward people, while feral cats are more cautious and avoidant. Knowing this will help you prepare for what to do with the cats after they have been trapped and neutered. Some cats may be socialized enough to be adopted while others should be returned to their outdoor home (see 'Special Scenarios' below.) Record the cats' socialization level on the tracking sheet.

Note: It can be difficult to discern a cat's level of socialization just by looking at her. The quick tips below will help. Remember: these tips are only a general guide. Each cat is different, so trust your judgment. You can learn more about the differences between socialized and feral cats at [alleycat.org/StrayOrFeral](http://alleycat.org/StrayOrFeral).

## A Socialized Cat



- Will likely approach you
- May immediately eat food you put down
- May be vocal
- May look disheveled
- May be seen at all hours of the day

## A Feral Cat



- Will not approach you
- Will wait until you leave before approaching food
- Will be more silent
- Will appear more groomed
- May be more active or only come out at night

## 2) Be Prepared for Special Scenarios

- **Kittens and/or Nursing Mothers:** You may come across kittens and/or nursing mothers in your trapping efforts. There are many factors for you to consider before you decide what your plan of action will be, including whether the mother is present, the age of the kittens, and the resources you have available. Learn what to look out for, and how to trap the entire family, at [alleycat.org/Kittens](http://alleycat.org/Kittens). If you decide to trap kittens and/or their mother, it's important to use the appropriate traps to ensure their safety (see an equipment list at [alleycat.org/](http://alleycat.org/)



**Equipment**). You should also make sure to follow proper post-surgery protocols for kittens and mothers, available at [alleycat.org/PostSurgery](https://alleycat.org/PostSurgery).

- **Ill or Injured Cats:** Plan ahead to ensure you can provide immediate care to, and make decisions about, any ill or injured cats you trap. Have the phone number of a veterinarian who works with community cats on hand, as well as one whose practice will be open while you are trapping. Build up an emergency fund to help cover unexpected expenses so you are prepared to get a cat immediate medical treatment if necessary.
- **Socialized Cats:** Have a plan in place for how to help socialized cats. For instance, will you find potential foster or adoptive homes, work with a local cat rescue group, or include the cats in your Trap-Neuter-Return program? Whatever your plan or resources, it's important to neuter and vaccinate every cat in the colony. For more information and tips on finding homes for socialized cats, visit [alleycat.org/FindingAHome](https://alleycat.org/FindingAHome).

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### 3) Establish a Feeding Schedule

To get the cats used to coming out and eating while you are there (and help with your assessment process), establish a set time and place to feed the cats every day. Feed the cats as much as they can eat in a 30-minute period, and pick up any remaining food after that period. If you have a feeding station, make sure it is positioned in an area that is free of human traffic and inconspicuous.

Remember to coordinate your feeding and trapping efforts with other caregivers. This will make the best use of your time and resources.

**Tip:** To make your TNR effort easier, put the cats' food in unset traps for one to two weeks prior to the trapping day. This will get the cats comfortable with seeing and walking into traps. Do not put food anywhere else but inside the trap, and remove the back door or secure the door of the trap so it stays open. Remove the traps after the cats eat so there are no risks of theft, damage, or trapping a cat accidentally.

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### 4) Find and Coordinate With a Community Cat-Friendly Veterinarian or Clinic

Make sure to work with a veterinarian or a spay/neuter clinic with community cat and TNR experience. Our Community Resource Tool may help you locate one in your area! Access the tool at [GetHelp.alleycat.org](https://GetHelp.alleycat.org).

Or you can educate your own veterinarian, who may not be familiar with community cats but is open to learning. Direct them to our comprehensive community cat veterinary resource center at [alleycat.org/Veterinarian](https://alleycat.org/Veterinarian).

Consider the following to help you choose your veterinarian or clinic and prepare them for the cats' neuter surgeries:

- **Prices:** Ask for the exact charge for spaying and neutering, vaccines, and all other treatments. Some clinics provide many services for a flat rate. Others itemize all the services they provide, including flea, deworming, and ear mite medication. Some may charge extra for any treatments related to surgery, such as anesthesia and pain medication. Ask if these treatments are optional and then decide which services to request. Alley Cat Allies strongly recommends that all cats being spayed or neutered receive pain medication unless there is a medical reason not to.
- **Appointment Policies:** Make sure the clinic understands the unpredictable nature of trapping cats. You may intend to trap six cats, but only end up trapping four. Conversely, you may think there are only six cats to be trapped, but discover a seventh as you are trapping. It's important that the clinic is flexible to accommodating a few more or less cats than expected.
- **Testing Protocols:** Ensure that testing for FeLV and FIV is not a requirement in the clinic you choose. Alley Cat Allies follows best practices based on research conducted by veterinary experts. Research indicates that community cats do not have a higher rate of disease than pet cats—the average rate of infection is 3 percent to 6 percent in both.

**Tip:** It is not common for community cats to get the 'pre-op' blood test, which is performed for pet cats at some veterinary hospitals.



Testing community cats for these diseases is a waste of resources and should not occur during the TNR process. Test results are not a diagnosis and can produce false positives, so we do not recommend euthanizing cats who test positive unless they are ill beyond recovery. Learn more about FeLV and FIV testing at [alleycat.org/FeLV-FIV](https://alleycat.org/FeLV-FIV).

- **Vaccines:** Find out which vaccinations the clinic requires, which vaccines they offer, and how much those vaccines cost. You will want to get rabies vaccines, as mandated by your state regulations. We also recommend feline distemper vaccines (FVRCP).
- **Ill or Injured Cats:** Know the clinic's policies concerning cats who need extra medical attention. Make sure you know how much they will charge for treatments, and that they call you before making any decisions about unexpected procedures for the cats. Ensure that you are given the ultimate decision regarding humane euthanasia, if necessary.
- **Kittens:** Does the clinic have age or weight requirements for neutering kittens? Ask for the clinic's kitten surgery protocol. Kittens can be safely spayed or neutered if they are healthy and weigh at least 2 pounds. To learn more about pediatric spay and neuter, go to [alleycat.org/PediatricSpayNeuter](https://alleycat.org/PediatricSpayNeuter). Consult with your veterinarian about feeding requirements for kittens prior to trapping. Kittens may not need to have food withheld before surgery because their metabolism is faster than adult cats. To learn how to safely feed cats while they are in their traps, go to [alleycat.org/PostSurgery](https://alleycat.org/PostSurgery).
- **Pregnant or In-Heat Females:** Will the veterinarian spay a pregnant female or a female in estrus (in heat) and are they experienced in the procedure? Is there an extra fee for this?
- **Recovery:** Find out when the clinic discharges cats after surgery, and if there are different discharge times for males, females, pregnant females, etc. Ask if the clinic holds cats overnight for recovery. If so, is there an extra charge for this service?
- **Eartipping:** Check that the clinic understands the importance of eartipping, and knows how to perform the procedure. Eartipping is the painless removal of the tip of a cat's left ear (approximately 3/8") while they are under anesthesia. An eartip is the universal identifier of a neutered and vaccinated community cat, and lets people know that the cat is healthy and should be left alone. Learn more about eartipping and find veterinary instructions at [alleycat.org/Eartip](https://alleycat.org/Eartip).



- **Microchipping:** Veterinarians should always scan cats for microchips. By scanning for microchips, you may help reunite a stray cat with a family that misses them! You can also discuss microchipping all the community cats you've brought in. Microchipping is a great way to keep track of the cats in a colony, and helps ensure that you'll be contacted if the cats are ever brought into a veterinary office or animal shelter by someone else.
- **Other Protocols:** Confirm that the clinic uses dissolvable sutures so no follow up appointment is needed to remove them. Also confirm that the staff will remove all items they attach to the cats, such as tags, bandages, collars, or any other items the clinic may use to identify or treat them. Be sure that the trap tags, which include important information about where each cat should be returned, stay on the traps and that the same cats are returned to the traps they were removed from. See our trap tag template at [alleycat.org/TrapTag](https://alleycat.org/TrapTag).

Provide your veterinarian with a cat clinic tag for each cat. This will ensure that both you and the clinic fully understand the expectations for this visit. (Template available at [alleycat.org/CatClinicTag](https://alleycat.org/CatClinicTag).)

See Surgery Recovery instructions for veterinarians at [alleycat.org/Veterinarian](https://alleycat.org/Veterinarian).

For more on what veterinarians must know about when working with community cats, visit: [alleycat.org/Veterinarian](https://alleycat.org/Veterinarian). For help with finding financial resources, go to [alleycat.org](https://alleycat.org) and search for “fundraising” and “financial tips.”

## 5) Set Up Your Holding/Recovery Area

- Choose an indoor, dry, temperature-controlled (about 75°F), and safe overnight holding/recovery area to use before and after the cats' surgeries.
- Some examples of acceptable locations are bathrooms, basements, garages. Your veterinarian or clinic may also have a recovery area, as discussed above.
- Make sure the recovery area is quiet and inaccessible to other animals.
- Ensure that all entries in and out (doors, windows, ceiling tiles, etc.) are closed at all times in the unlikely event that a cat escapes from her trap.





## 6) Assemble Your Trapping Kit

Your trapping kit should include:

- **A FRIEND.** Alley Cat Allies recommends trapping with at least one other person for your safety and peace of mind. A cell phone and flashlight are also suggested for these reasons.
- **TRAPS.** You should have one trap per cat, plus a few extra in case unexpected cats appear. For a list of traps Alley Cat Allies recommends, go to [alleycat.org/Equipment](https://www.alleycat.org/Equipment).
- **BAIT.** You need to give cats a reason to enter traps. We like using several large pop-top cans of tuna, mackerel, sardines, or other smelly fish. The canned fish should be packed in oil so it does not dry out. If you don't bring pop-top cans, be sure to bring a can opener.
- **WET WIPES** or paper towels for easy cleanup.
- **FORKS** or spoons (to scoop out the bait).
- **NEWSPAPER** to line the bottom of the traps and tape or clothespins to hold it to the trap floor if necessary (like on windy days). Magnetic vent covers also do the trick!
- **TRAP LABELS** (see page 14 for suggested text) with room for the date, cat description, exact location where the cat was trapped, and room for any observations, such as noticeable injuries.
- **TRAP COVERS** that are big enough (i.e. beach-size towels, blankets, or sheets—cut to size) to fully cover the top and all four sides of each trap. One cover per trap.



- CARABINERS, twist ties, or pipe cleaners to secure the closed doors of the traps.
- TRASH BAGS for tuna lids, used plastic ware, etc.
- THICK GLOVES to wear for your safety and comfort while carrying the cats in traps.

- ALLEY CAT ALLIES' COMMUNITY CAT COLONY TRACKING SYSTEM ([alleycat.org/Tracking](http://alleycat.org/Tracking)) and pen or pencil and clipboard.



- VEHICLE LINERS such as cardboard, large plastic trash bags, a plastic shower curtain, or towels. Puppy pads also work well if the cats have “accidents.”
- BUNGEE CORDS to hold traps securely in place in your vehicle during transportation.
- PATIENCE. Trapping can be time-consuming and sometimes a bit stressful. If you remember to stay calm and follow the plan you created, you will be successful!

For more details on what to pack, visit [alleycat.org/Equipment](http://alleycat.org/Equipment).

## 7) Prepare Equipment

Practice setting and baiting traps ahead of time. It's always a good idea to test all your traps to ensure they are functioning properly.



Fill in the trap tag with your name, phone number, and information on what you are doing.

See our trap tag template at [alleycat.org/TrapTag](http://alleycat.org/TrapTag).

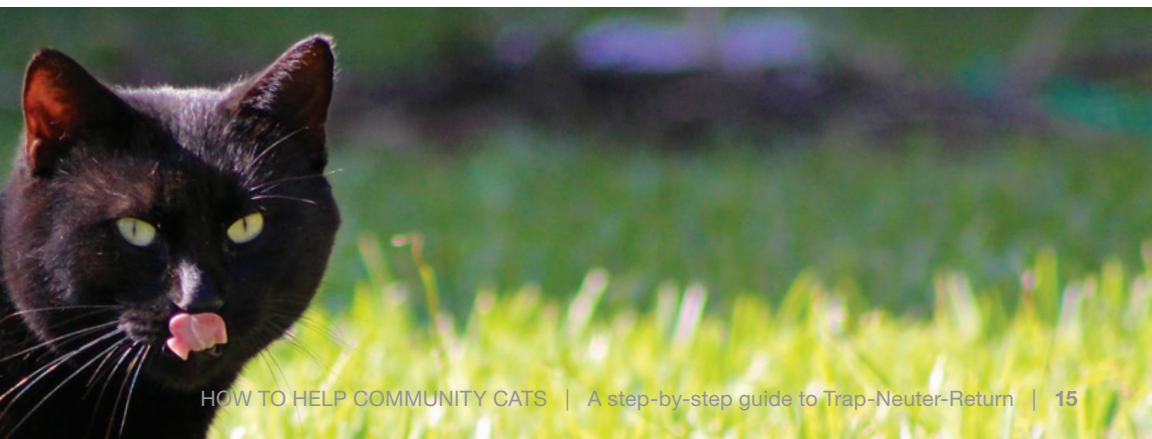
Use a vehicle that comfortably fits all the traps inside its climate-controlled area. DO NOT stack cats in traps on top of each other and NEVER put cats in the trunk or open bed of a vehicle. Lay a tarp over the seats or back of the vehicle to set the traps on.

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## 8) Make Spay and Neuter Appointments With the Clinic

Pick the day you will trap and schedule your neuter appointments as close to the time of trapping as possible. Aim to trap the day before or the morning of the appointments. The number of reservations should equal the number of cats you plan to trap. Make sure the clinic knows that you may end up bringing in more cats than expected. Inquire whether or not the clinic will hold the cats overnight while they recover from surgery.

**Now you are ready to start trapping!**





# STEP 2: Trapping

## 1) Set Up and Prepare for Trapping

Do all your setup and preparation away from the colony site. Remember: feral cats are generally fearful of people. Trapping will also go more smoothly if you don't disrupt the cats' feeding area. Throughout the entire trapping process, clinic stay, recovery, and return, you should make the environment around the cats as calm and quiet as possible. This will help minimize their stress.

Withhold food 24 hours before trapping, but always provide water. This will ensure that the cats are hungry enough to go into the traps. Remind other caregivers and neighbors to withhold food as well.

On the day of trapping, prepare all the traps:

- Count all your traps and record how many you have. Draw a rough map of where you're placing traps to help keep track of them. Write down which cat came from which location, if your trapping area is large.
- Line trap bottoms with newspaper. Tape or clothespin the paper down if it's windy.
- Run a test to make sure the trip plate is functioning properly before you bait the trap.
- Place about one tablespoon of bait at the very back of the trap so the cat must step on the trip plate to reach the food. You may choose to put the food on a safe, disposable container (such as a plastic lid or paper plate). Drizzle



some juice from the bait in a zigzag pattern along the trap floor toward the entrance. Also place a tiny bit of food (¼ 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. The cat must be hungry enough to continue to the trip plate, and they need to have a near empty stomach for at least 12 hours before surgery.**



- Place the traps on level ground at the colony site. The cats will not enter an unstable or wobbly trap. Make sure the traps are not placed on a hill where they could tip or roll over when the cats enter them. Metal traps should never be placed on particularly hot or cold pavement, or they could become painful to cats' paws.
- Fill in the exact location where you are setting the trap on your trap label. This will make return much easier!
- Cover the traps and leave only about 1/4 of the front of the trap exposed. If you find the cats aren't going into the traps, try removing the covers. Every cat is different, so you may need to use a combination of covered and uncovered traps.
- Set the trap and move away from the area and out of sight of the cats.

**Tip:** Keep an eye on the traps at all times for the safety of the cats, and to make sure your equipment is not taken or tampered with. Observe from a location far enough away that the cats will not be disturbed, but close enough to see all the traps.

**Be patient. At each trap, wait for a cat to enter and for the trap to close.**

## 2) Once Cats Are Trapped, Calmly Approach the Traps:

- Do not open the traps or touch the cats, even if it appears that the cats are hurting themselves. Cats may thrash around after being trapped. Do not be alarmed by this—they are just scared and it is completely normal. Covering the trap will calm them down almost immediately. Remember: the only time cats should be removed from traps is during surgery and when you return them to their outdoor homes.
- When trapping an entire colony, use your best judgment about removing each cat as they are trapped. Going to get one trap could scare away the other cats and disrupt the rest of the trapping. Wait to remove the trapped cats until other cats are not around. When setting out your traps, partially cover the back end of them to give trapped cats a bit of security until you can cover them fully.



- Keep in mind that these are only guidelines. Some situations may call for you to deviate from them, so trust your instincts. For example, if a cat is severely thrashing around, you may need to immediately cover the trap and remove it from the area. If you are trapping in very cold or hot weather, cats should be covered and moved to a temperature-controlled location (like your car) as soon as they are trapped. **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 to be sitting in a trap.
- Count your traps again before leaving the trapping area to ensure you don't leave any behind.

**Tip:** Cats can become trap-shy (frightened to go near or enter a trap) or trap-savvy (able to eat the bait without triggering the trap). If this happens, don't get discouraged. There are several techniques to humanely trap hard-to-trap-cats, including the use of a drop-trap. Please visit [alleycat.org/HardtoTrap](http://alleycat.org/HardtoTrap) to learn more.



### 3) Transport the Cats From the Trapping Site

Safely transport the cats to the veterinarian's office, clinic, or a holding area you have already prepared. Please refer to the preparation section starting on page 6..



## STEP 3: Post-Surgery

- Each cat should be returned to you in the same labelled trap in which she was brought to the clinic, with clean newspaper inside. You should receive medical records, including rabies vaccine certificates. Be sure to save these for your files!
- Let the cats recover overnight in their traps. Make sure the traps remain in the climate-controlled and quiet recovery area that you already prepared. When a cat is recovering from anesthesia, she is unable to regulate her body temperature. This is why it's so important for the recovery area to be warm but not hot—about 75°F.
- While the cats are recovering, keep their traps covered. This reduces the stress on the cats and ensures both you and they are safe.

**Tip:** According to Julie Levy (DVM, PhD), a leading cat veterinarian and researcher, cats can be returned to their outdoor homes 24 hours after surgery if they're clear-eyed and alert. The clinic may ask you to make exceptions for cats who are slow to recover or need continuing post-operative care. You may also consider holding the cats longer if it is freezing outside, since anesthesia drugs can impair cats' ability to regulate their body temperature. However, always return the cats as soon as you can. "Rapid return" is associated with better outcomes, as confinement is extremely stressful for most community cats.



- Monitor the cats. Keep an eye out for bleeding, infection, illness, or lack of appetite. If a cat is bleeding, vomiting, breathing irregularly, or not waking up, contact your veterinarian immediately!
- Feed kittens under 6 months old shortly after they wake from anesthesia. Adult cats can be fed a few hours after they wake, but you may wait to feed them until after you return them to their colony site. To learn how to safely feed cats while they are in their traps, go to [alleycat.org/PostSurgery](https://alleycat.org/PostSurgery).
- Return the cats to the same location where you trapped them. Early morning is a good time, as it is quieter. Point the traps away from roads or high-traffic areas so the cats don't run into them. Open the front door of the trap and then completely remove the cover. If the trap has a back door, move the cover away and pull the door up and off (if possible with your trap), then completely remove the cover and walk away. Be careful to keep your distance and keep your fingers and hands as far from the cat as possible when opening the trap. Sometimes it takes the cats a moment to realize where they are, but they will run off once they get their bearings. Watch videos of cats being returned and how to do Trap-Neuter-Return at [youtube.com/AlleyCatAllies](https://youtube.com/AlleyCatAllies).
- Once you have returned the cats, provide food and water. If you are the cats' caregiver, you can resume the cats' regular feeding schedule.
- The cats may stay away from the area for a few days after being returned, but they will come back eventually.
- Clean traps with non-toxic disinfectant, throw out all newspaper, and wash trap covers.
- For more detailed post-surgery instructions, visit [alleycat.org/PostSurgery](https://alleycat.org/PostSurgery).





GREAT JOB!

# You made it through a successful trapping.

You did it! You have joined the hundreds of thousands of compassionate individuals and groups across the globe who are working to protect and improve the lives of community cats. Thanks to you, the cats you helped will live happier, healthier lives. Your compassion and commitment has helped your whole community. It's people like you that make a huge difference—be proud!

## Now what?

- Protect cats in your community and around the world by becoming an advocate. Stay up to date on the latest updates, information, news, opportunities, events, and calls to action by joining the movement to protect and improve cats' lives at [alleycat.org/SignUp](https://alleycat.org/SignUp).
- Trap any remaining cats who eluded your first round of trapping, and any newcomers who have joined the colony.
- If you will be trapping on a larger scale or continuing to trap in surrounding areas, you should implement “targeted trapping.” It is the most effective method of trapping because it targets entire colonies in a single geographic location before moving on to the surrounding colonies. This ensures that local populations are stabilized, creating “kitten-free zones.” To learn more about targeted trapping visit [alleycat.org/TargetedTrapping](https://alleycat.org/TargetedTrapping).
- Find even more guidelines and tips for Trap-Neuter-Return and community cat colony care at [alleycat.org/Community-Cat-Care](https://alleycat.org/Community-Cat-Care).
- Maintain good relations with neighbors and address any concerns as they come up. To learn more about troubleshooting with neighbors, refer to our *How to Live with Cats in Your Neighborhood* guide at [alleycat.org/Deterrents](https://alleycat.org/Deterrents).
- Learn about the other resources Alley Cat Allies offers, including newsletters, videos, and merchandise. Sign up to stay informed on all the latest issues facing cats at [alleycat.org](https://alleycat.org). For more personalized help, you can access our online assistance form at [alleycat.org/GetHelp](https://alleycat.org/GetHelp).

# How Old Is That Kitten? A Quick Guide

If you see a kitten outdoors, determining her age is critical to determine what care she may need. Our quick guide is here to help! Find complete information, including kitten care, at [alleycat.org/KittenProgression](http://alleycat.org/KittenProgression)



## New Born

When kittens are first born they are completely helpless—their **eyes are closed**, their **ears are folded**, and they can't stand, keep themselves warm, eliminate waste, or eat on their own. They rely on mom for everything!



## One Week

Darling is starting to become **more aware of his surroundings!** At about seven days old, a kitten's ears will unfold and their eyes may start to open.



## Two Weeks

Look at those blue peepers! Darling's **eyes are fully open**, and he is taking his **first wobbly steps**. Kittens this age start interacting more with each other, but still need mom.



## Three Weeks

Darling's now playing with his siblings and getting more mobile. You should be able to **tell if kittens are boys or girls**. You can start providing a **litter box** and **wet food**.



## Four Weeks

Look how much Darling has grown! At four weeks kittens are **sturdy on their feet** and playing with each other, toys, and people.



## Five Weeks

Get ready for a lot of fun! Darling is now full of energy and **plays exuberantly**. **Interacting with people** is important for kittens at this age. Darling is developing lots of personality!

## How Old Is That Kitten? A Quick Guide *continued*



### Six Weeks

Every day Darling is getting more sure of himself through socialization and play. He's **using the litter box** and **eating cat food**—though he still visits mom for snacks and comfort.



### Seven Weeks

Darling is **almost fully weaned**, and continues to play and learn. Being **introduced to new people, places** in the home, and **other pets** is an important part of socialization.



### Eight Weeks

Two pounds! Darling now **weighs enough to be neutered**. He's also getting more skilled and adventurous. Darling is learning so much from his mom, siblings, and human caregiver.

### Nine Weeks

Looking pretty grown-up, Darling! At this age kittens are behaving and using their body language like adult cats. Darling is **eating all solid food**, and his eyes have gone from blue to yellow.



ready to take on the world!



### Ten Weeks

Darling is fully weaned, neutered, and—because he was socialized to people—**ready for his loving adoptive home**. They grow up so fast!



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