

Humane Trapping

How Humane Traps Work

A humane trap is a small wire cage with a door on one end and a trip plate on its floor. There may be a second door on the back of the trap. To set the trap, push in then lift up the front door and latch it open with the small hook above the door. The hook is connected to the trip plate, so when you press on the trip plate, the door closes.

Where to Find Humane Traps

Traps can be borrowed from The SF/SPCA, or borrowed or rented from pet supply stores, veterinarians, or your local humane society. Traps can be purchased through pet supply stores, hardware stores or distributors like Tomahawk at (800) 272-8727 or Animal Care Equipment Services at (800) 338-2237.

Important Tips

- Understand how the trap works before you set it.
- Never leave a trap unattended.
- Once the cat is trapped, keep the trap loosely covered with a sheet or towel.
- When carrying a trapped cat, hold the trap away from your body.
- Always be sure both doors are securely latched to prevent escape.

Conditioning the Cat to the Trap

Some cats can be trapped immediately, but more wary cats will need to be conditioned to the trap.

To do this, feed the cats daily at the same time in the same location. Place a trap in the area you feed. Open the door of the trap and secure it open with a piece of string or wire. Put the food outside the trap, but near the open door. Each time you feed, move the food nearer, then into the trap. The door should still be wired open. You can also use a cage, medium or large pet carriers, or a cardboard box.

Trapping

Set the trap at the cats' normal feeding time. You may want to withhold food for one day prior to trapping to ensure that the cat is hungry enough to go into the trap. Line the bottom of the trap with a thin sheet of newspaper and put some wet food, mackerel, anchovies, or tuna in a paper or plastic dish set all the way in the back of the trap. Trail a tiny bit of food inside the trap from the front to the back.

To avoid accidentally trapping skunks or raccoons, try to trap before dark or just after dawn.

After the trap is set, hide out of sight—in your car, behind bushes or trees, or anywhere the cat cannot see you. Once the cat is trapped, approach quietly and cover the trap with a sheet or towel. This will quickly calm the cat down.

Hard To Catch Cats

For very wary cats, you may need two weeks or more of conditioning before they will go in the trap. You can make a trap more enticing by putting a bit of canned food, baby food, or catnip on the outside of the trap.

Cats love the smell of a pungent herb called valerian—try boiling some in water to make a strong-smelling broth. It is hard for cats to resist.

If ongoing trapping has caused some of the cats to become trap shy, try waiting a week or two before resuming trapping. A short break can reduce the cats' fear of the trap.

Sick cats can be particularly difficult to catch. Try baiting the trap with warm chicken broth, warm water, valerian, or warmed up baby food.

Trapping Kittens

It is best to use a kitten-sized trap. If you cannot find one, tie a string to the door of a plastic pet carrier. Then run the string through the inside of the carrier and out the holes at the back. Set a brick or something heavy behind the carrier so it will remain stationary when you pull the string. Hide out of sight holding the string. When the kitten enters the carrier, pull the string and hold tight so she cannot push the door open. Keep the string taut until you latch the door. (Please keep in mind that all feral cats must be in humane traps for The SF/SPCA Feral Fix Program).

If you are trying to catch a mother cat and her kittens, first catch the kittens and place them in a plastic pet carrier. Then set a humane trap and place the carrier with the kittens behind the trap. (The door of the carrier should be facing the back of the trap.) Cover the end of the trap and the whole carrier with a sheet or towel. The food and the sound of the kittens crying will lure the mom cat into the trap.

Selective Trapping

In colonies where most of the cats have already been trapped, you may need to control when the trap door closes so you can catch the right cat. This is called selective trapping.

The SF/SPCA has traps modified for selective trapping, or you can prepare your own. Purchase a small hook (the type used for a hook-and-eye latch) at the hardware store. Attach it on the trap next to the hook that normally holds the trap door open. When the door is held open with your new hook, stepping on the trip plate does not shut the door. Tie a string to the new hook. Pulling the string will release the door.

Set your modified trap as described above, and hide out of sight holding the string. Put extra food in the trap, as many cats may go in and out before the right one does.

Post-Surgery Care

After spay/neuter surgery, cats can be held in their traps for 24-36 hours until they are ready to be returned to their habitats. See our "Post-Surgery Recovery Care" fact sheet for details.

San Francisco SPCA Resources

- Fact sheets including "The Care and Feeding of Feral Cats," "Post-Surgery Recovery Care," and more.
- Lifeline for Feral Cats (415) 554-3071. We can provide advice specific to your situation.
- Feral Cat Video Series, including *Humane Trapping*.
- The SF/SPCA Feral Fix Program provides free spay/neuter for San Francisco feral cats, no appointment necessary.