



Community Cat Trapping 101 – The Basics

Need to rent a humane trap? Call us at 415.522.3539 or email communitycats@sfspca.org, and we'll make an appointment for you to rent one of ours. Trap rentals require a refundable deposit (credit card only) for a two-week rental (see website or call for current fee). Your deposit will be refunded once you have returned the trap, provided it is returned clean and in good, working condition.

Don't feed the day or evening before trapping

The cat is more likely to enter the trap quickly if it's hungry. For a particularly wary cat, you might not want to feed it for two days prior to trapping. If other people are feeding cats in the area, ask them not to leave out food the day or two before you trap.

Setting the trap

- Check the most recent schedule for the spay/neuter clinic and drop off times. Make arrangements to hold the cat overnight as needed.
- Set the trap at the cat's normal feeding time.
- Line the trap with a pillowcase or lightweight towel. This will protect the cat's feet and hide the step plate. Place your bait food in first, at the very back of the trap, to make it easy to set the step plate. Then, set the trap. Place the trap on a level surface close to where you normally feed the cat.
- Stay in the vicinity. Keep watch and listen for the sound of the trap snapping shut.
- Check the trap at least every hour.
- Traps should not be left unattended and never left out overnight.

Once the cat is trapped

Once trapped, a cat may panic. Immediately after the trap has shut, cover the trap with a dark blanket or large towel and immediately move it to a quiet, dark location. After a short time, the cat will calm down. If holding the cat overnight, place the trap on top of a towel to absorb urine. When transporting the cat to the spay/neuter clinic, be sure to place a towel or tarp on your car seat.



Your trapping should coincide with our clinic schedule and your appointment time, please see our website for details. Ideally you should trap the night before or early on the day you plan to bring cats in for surgery so they don't remain in their traps for long. If it is too hot or cold outside for you, it is too hot or cold for the cats.

Having difficult trapping? Is the cat too wary of the trap to go in? Get the cat used to eating inside the unset trap

This is called "trap training". Feed the cat at the same place and time of day. Try leaving the trap unset and covered with a large towel during routine feeding so that the animal will get used to seeing and smelling it in the area. Remove the trap after each feeding.

After a few days, start putting food in the trap. Each day put the food a little further in, until the cat is comfortable eating in the trap. On trapping day, put the food all the way at the back so the cat will have to walk far enough in to trip the trip-plate that springs the door shut.

Transporting trapped cats

Never move trapped cats in the open bed of a pickup truck. If traps must be stacked inside the vehicle, be sure to secure the traps with bungee cords or other restraints and place towels or newspaper between the stacked traps. If an unsecured trap tips sideways or upside down, it can open and release the cat. Use your best judgment when stacking.

Trapping kittens

It is best to use a kitten-size trap. Please let us know if you have kittens to trap and we can make sure to loan you the smaller sized trap.

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 trap and place the carrier with the kittens behind the trap, with the door of the carrier facing the back of the trap. Cover the end of the trap and the entire carrier with a sheet or towel.

Food and the sound of the kittens crying will lure mom into the trap.



Selective Trapping

In colonies where most of the cats have been trapped, you need to control when the trap door closes so you can catch the right cat. This is selective trapping. We are happy to work with you or provide advice on this style of trapping. Please contact us for more information.

Remember... With proper planning and training, your trap-neuter-return (TNR) project can be successfully implemented. Trapping may feel awkward at first, and you may need to trap a few times before you feel at ease.

Call or email us with questions or if you just need someone to talk to about your project. Every time you assist in neutering a cat, you will have helped more cats live safe and healthy lives without increasing the feral cat population.