

SHELTERS AND FEEDING STATIONS FOR FERAL CATS

SHELTER: Shelter is essential for all cats living out of doors. Providing shelter can be challenging as well as deeply rewarding. Other than a warm and dry place to sleep at night, it can also provide a safe place away from predators and hostile situations. After the requirements for feeding and feeding stations are in place, shelter is the next greatest concern.

DISCUSSION: All shelters and feeding stations should be out of sight, no matter how friendly the area may appear. My general rule is to camouflage and or conceal everything and place all outdoor shelters and feeding stations out of sight with only the persons who are feeding and caretaking aware of their locations. This can include your backyard. Complaints from an unfriendly neighbor could jeopardize your humane efforts on behalf of stray or feral cats residing there.



SHELTER AREA: Assessment of safe shelter location should be made in any area where feral or stray cats are being cared for. Shelters should be warm, waterproof and sturdy enough to withstand the elements. Although we tend to think of shelter as being important only in the winter, it is equally important year around.

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING SHELTER: Carports, backyards, gazebos, garages, warehouses, basements with access, barns, storage rooms, tool sheds, laundry rooms, out-buildings, under houses, porches or other structures, abandoned buildings, abandoned houses, and many others.

One example: If the shelter area is under a house or other similar structure, be sure there is an opening 7 x 7 inches. Place pieces of wood, linoleum, or anything with a firm surface inside the structure on the ground and dirt areas outside of the opening. Then, put the sleeping quarters into the area, such as cardboard boxes or

cardboard boxes within cardboard boxes, plastic storage bins, fleece or any other material that will provide warmth and comfort. There are areas under houses where hot water pipes are located that could provide warmth in the winter. With imagination and innovation, safe and dry shelter can be created under a house or other structures and within existing structures. The general rule is to provide shelter within the shelter if the existing areas are large.

PROVIDING OUTSIDE SHELTER: If you are providing shelter for your feral cats on your property, you will probably have more options and a safer place for them. But, the basics for warmth and protection from the elements with food protected and fresh water will be equally important. All cats living out of doors need a safe place to eat, sleep and rest. All outside shelter must be off the ground a few inches to keep the inside dry. Bricks, cement blocks, wooden boards, trellis or any materials that will raise it up off the ground can be used. You may be putting shelter on uneven ground, in bushes or other discrete areas where leveling of the surface may be necessary.

If you are creating shelter in an existing space that is high off the ground, be sure the cats will be able to jump into the opening.

The following are instructions and helpful information for constructing outside shelters in a limited amount of space available under and around bushes: First, measure the area where the shelter is to be installed. Cut the existing branches, so it can be placed far back under the foliage. **Do not cut too much until you are actually ready to put the shelter in place, as the brush can serve as support and concealment.** If the shelter cannot be completely concealed, use plastic similar foliage, fastened to the shelters and existing bushes to blend into the surrounding landscape. There are various types of materials that can be found at the Army-Navy Surplus stores that work well. I have planted sturdy plants by shelter areas for concealment and to make access more difficult for dogs and people.

Example of a shelter for two: Purchase heavy duty plastic storage containers with lids. Sit them upright with the lid as the roof. If you turn them over with the lids on the bottom, extra measures must be taken to keep the rain from pooling around the inside of the lid and leaking into the sleeping area. Cut a hole 6 " x 6 " (even the



chubbiest cat will fit – but most dogs won't) on one end or on the side of the container close to the corner, up 4–5 inches from the bottom. This is very important, as it will keep the inside of the shelter dry. If you are placing the shelter far back in the bushes and have room for one or more, they can be positioned for better protection and

escape by having them face one another, or on an angle or facing a thick dense growth, etc. I have created tunnels for escape and used other materials to create barriers, that blend into the area.

When using plastic storage containers with one hole cut on the side, or the end, an awning must be made. The heavy awning covering the opening and extending beyond the width of the shelter gives a certain amount of protection and safety. If there is a need for an additional escape hole do not cut holes directly across from each other, as it creates a draft. Additional awning will be required to cover the second hole.

My personal experience with the use of storage containers with awnings, is that **the cats feel safe** having a heavy awning across the front of the container and covering the opening. They can exit the opening and run in either direction behind the safety of the awning. I have had cats stay in their shelters while gardeners cut trees and worked all around them. **As a rule, I create an awning in front of any type of shelter that sits on the ground, no matter the size.**

Awnings can be made of heavy duty black plastic rolls, rolls of lucite, plastic sheets, heavy duty garbage bags or many other suitable materials. To create an awning, measure from the back at ground level, across the top and down the front of the container or other type of shelter, to ground



level, adding an additional 6–8 inches in length beyond ground level in the front. Measure an additional 6 inches on either side of the opening for width to keep the wind and rain from blowing in the sides. Cut and fold the black plastic according to the total measurements. The measurements of the awning will start from the back of the container, across the top and down the front, over the opening to the ground, extending 6–8 inches beyond ground level allowing it to lay on the ground and 6 inches in width on either side of the opening. You do not need to make a flap to cover the sides, however, the more insulation you can install on the outside, the better. Leave as much room as possible inside for the rug and bedding if the shelters are small.

The awning will create insulation and protection and keep the rain and wind from entering the shelter. The longer length in front of the opening will keep the flap from blowing (a brick can be placed on the flap if very windy) to provide additional safety. After the measurements have been completed, the awning is then sealed with black duct tape over the folds and along the bottom to be sure no leakage of water can get inside. You will have a rectangular piece of heavy duty black plastic material, sealed with black duct tape and ready to be attached to the bin with duct tape. **Before attaching the awning, cover the entire container with heavy duty black plastic, taping the edges firmly in place. You now have a sturdy and warm shelter. As a rule, I use dark materials that are less noticeable.**

When installing the shelter, place it on bricks, trellis, cement blocks, wood or anything that will provide a platform off the ground a couple of inches or more. Make sure it is steady and against something firm. If this cannot be achieved, put cement blocks (like stepping blocks) on the top or sides of the shelter to secure it in place.



To insulate cover the inside with reflective surface (reflector insulation material from the hardware store is seen here, those with financial constraints can use car reflectors instead). Measure and cut carpeting for the bed inside. Put fleece on top for the winter and towels in the

summer. Towels hold dampness and are not good for use in winter months.

Example of a shelter for two

or more: Extra large storage container placed on its side. Lid will not be used for this shelter as a roof. Lids can be placed under the containers as a platform. Purchase an additional storage container, more like a storage drawer you might use under the bed.



Measure both containers to be sure the storage drawer will fit into the storage container lying on its side. Once again, you can insulate the storage drawer using reflective material (picture shows insulated and uninsulated drawer). You will now have the large container with a drawer about 6 or 8 inches high sliding completely into the opening. Depending upon the size, 3 or 4 cats could cuddle up inside.



Continue exactly as with the smaller shelter, as to the awning and covering the container. Always cover it first and then attach the awning over it. Check all corners and be sure it is secure. The awning, being 6–8 inches longer, can also be draped close against the opening and the cats can

squeeze in the sides and exit easily. This shelter will have an opening larger than the 7" x 7". To make the opening smaller, when covering the container with plastic before the awning is installed, bring the plastic over the front about 6 inches. With the drawer in place there will probably be about a 7–8 inch high opening between the drawer and the plastic overhang from the top inside, depending upon the size.

Putting wood, cement blocks or other materials on the ground in front of the shelter will keep the bedding cleaner and drier. For additional insulation home improvement stores have various

products. Discarded wood and other materials can also be used for shelters. There are many innovative ways to provide shelter that is safe, warm and dry. Plan ahead carefully. After the shelter is ready for occupancy, I put in a little catnip, and a treat inside and say a prayer for the beloved occupants.

It has been my experience that no matter how friendly the area may appear, if you are providing shelter away from your home, concealment is absolutely necessary. Circumstances change and people change.

MATERIALS THAT CAN BE USED FOR SHELTERING:

Plastic storage containers with lids

Plastic storage drawers

Foam insulated boxes (may need to weighted down)

Wooden boxes or crates

Art canvas boards (covered in black plastic) before constructing

Plywood or any wood that can be cut or used for shelter and/or foundation

Milk crates

Discarded materials or scraps

Plexiglas—can be cut to size and a rectangular or tent-like shelter can be made with wooden flooring made from palates

Wooden palates

Dog igloos

Covered Litter boxes (hole already cut) needs to be covered and an awning made.

Any type of purchased or discarded shelter-type materials, such as drawers from desks or cabinets

Lucite sheets or rolls for covering large areas for waterproofing and awnings

Small nails, staples and gun

Duct tape (black)

Heavy duty plastic material (black)

Carpeting for inside shelters and entrance

Fleece bedding or blankets for winter and towels for summer

In colder climates, additional insulation will be required.

FEEDING STATIONS:

If you are feeding colonies of feral cats away from your home, feeding stations will be necessary. Feeding stations will insure that all of the cats will be fed and not just those who come out when the caretaker arrives. It is important to insure that the cats have plenty of food and this can be done with wildlife in mind, if it is an issue.



Feeding stations should be out of sight and protected from the elements. Plastic storage containers with constructed awnings are also good protection for food and water. The awnings for feeding stations only need the front covered which will help protect the food from rain and the elements. There are dozens of

ways to set up feeding stations, from accommodating two –20 pound feeders to smaller ones. If you can, create a feeding station with enough room for at least one cat to go in and eat. Cleanliness in all areas is essential. Refer to Feeding Instructions for Feral Cats.

It never ceases to amaze me at how the cats instinctively gravitate to their shelters. Sometimes, as soon as they are finished and in place, I will see them venturing in. At other times, I have had them sit and watch while I measured and installed the shelters. Even when I find a little nook, barely big enough for one cat and manage to create a shelter, I find cat hair, leaves, etc. I have come to understand, over the years, the value the cats place on their shelters. It has been a remarkable experience for me to observe their little faces, sleepy eyes and dry coats, as they come out and stretch and go to their food. On those cold and stormy nights, when I am cozy in my bed, I can feel good, knowing I have done my very best to provide them with a loving place to rest their little heads.

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