



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. They also offer a safe place for birthing and kittens are much easier to domesticate and locate when born in a safe shelter. After the requirements for feeding and feeding stations are in place, shelter is the next greatest concern. Talk with other caretakers and exchange information on creative ways to shelter and feed. Look around the area for structures that are safe and can be used for shelter. Be innovative and diligent.

DISCUSSION: All shelters and feeding stations should be out of sight, no matter how friendly the area may appear. The 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 the stray cats residing there. ***Neighbors move and people change!***

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 to the cats. On the warmest days, we see the cats in their shelters sleeping.

EXAMPLES OF EXISTING SHELTER- FOR PHOTOS GO TO www.feralcatcaretakers.org under sheltering

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. Creative comfortable and warm shelter can be created in these areas (if safe), by placing smaller shelter or sleeping areas within the larger structures.

SHELTERS UNDER HOUSES OR OTHER STRUCTURES: If the shelter is under a house or other similar structure, be sure to reduce the opening to about 6 x 6 inches with the ability to make it larger for insertion and removal of shelter and sleeping areas. Place pieces of wood, linoleum or anything with a firm surface and easy to keep clean ***inside the structure*** and on the ground outside if there are dirt areas outside of the opening. Then, put the sleeping or shelter into the area, such as cardboard boxes, or cardboard boxes within the cardboard boxes, plastic storage bins, old drawers or plastic drawers (storage type) or any other materials that will provide warmth and comfort – on top of the surface you have provided inside. There are also 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 safely installed. The general rule is to provide shelter within the shelter if the existing areas are large. If you can block off the areas that are not used for shelter, this would discourage the cats from using the dirt as a litter box is this could be a problem. Putting a litter box inside where the space is large enough is also helpful.

PROVIDING OUTSIDE SHELTER: If you are providing shelter for your feral cats on your property it will probably much safer for the cats. The basics for warmth and protection from the elements with food protected and fresh water is 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 to keep the inside dry. Bricks, cement blocks, wooden boards, trellis, or any materials that will raise it up off of the ground can be used. If you are putting shelter on uneven ground, in bushes or other discrete areas, leveling of the surface will 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 easily jump into the opening.*

Do not assume there is adequate shelter. Make the effort to see there is!

The following are instructions and helpful information for constructing outside shelters in a limited amount of space, available under and around bushes or other areas: Begin by measuring the area where the shelter is to be installed. ***After you have measured the area where the shelter will be installed, this will determine how large a storage container you will need.*** Cut the existing branches, so the shelter can be placed far back under the foliage. Do not cut too much until you are actually ready to install the shelter, 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 Arm-Navy Surplus stores that work well. We have planted sturdy plants by shelter areas for concealment and to make the access more difficult for dogs and people. If shelters are being placed in areas without foliage, blend them into the surrounding landscape. For example, a woodpile or wooden palates, use extra wood and existing things that are present to hide the shelter area. Ask yourself, does it blend into the area? If it does, a job well done!

SHELTER FOR TWO or MORE, USING LID AS ROOF: Purchase large heavy-duty plastic storage containers, such as Rubber Maid, with lids. Use a 30-40 gallon or larger, depending upon where they will be installed. Sit them upright with the lid as the roof. We recommend that you sit the storage container upright and use the lid for the roof. A hole must be cut in the container, 6 x 6 inches, up 5 inches from the bottom, cutting near the corner of the bin lengthwise and 5 inches from the end. Do not cut the hole in the center, as it will be drafty and more exposed. ***This is very important, as it will keep the shelter dry.*** If you are placing the shelter far back in the bushes or in a concealed place and have room for more than one, they can be positioned for better protection and escape by having them face one another or on an angle facing a dense thick growth, etc. We have created tunnels for escape and used other materials to create barriers that blend into the area. **THIS CAN ALSO BE USED AS A FEEDING STATION**

When using large plastic containers with one hole cut on the facing side, lengthwise, or the end, an awning must be made. A heavy awning covering the opening and extending beyond the width of the shelter, gives an added amount of protection and is an essential part of shelter building, even if wood is used. 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 additional hole. **All awnings must reach to the ground and past about 10-12 inches at least. A brick will be put at the bottom of the awning in the front on the surface to hold it down and keep from blowing.** The awnings make the cats feel safe as they can exit the opening and run in either direction behind the safety of the awning. I have observed cats staying in their shelters with gardeners working all around them. The small opening of 6 x 6 inches does not allow for large predators. ***As a rule, create an awning in front of any type of shelter that sits on the ground. Awnings can be made of heavy duty (4 mm.) black plastic rolls, rolls of Lucite, plastic sheets, heavy-duty garbage bags or many other suitable materials, as long as they blend into the environment.***

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 10-12 inches in length beyond ground level in the front. Measure an additional 10-12 inches on either side of the opening for width to keep the wind and rain from blowing in the sides (which will be folded to create a smaller opening) and duct taped like a cup. Cut and fold the awning material according to the measurements. You will have a sturdy large piece of awning material duct taped and ready to install. ***The measurements of the awning will start from the back of the shelter, across the top, down the front, extending out 10-12 inches on either side and extending 10-12 inches in front past ground level.*** The sides of the container should be covered with lighter plastic garbage bags, etc. If the shelters are small, any good insulation can be installed on the outside, leaving room for fleece or bedding.

For good insulation and warmth, rolls of thick silver reflector material can be cut to fit the bottom of the shelters and will reflect the cat's warmth back into the bedding. The material can also be used as inside insulation if the weather is very cold.

Awnings create insulation and protection and keep the rain and wind from entering the shelter. The longer length in front of the opening will help 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 enter. The awning will be a rectangular piece of heavy duty black plastic or other similar material, sealed with black duct tape and ready to be attached to the bin with duct tape. Before attaching, you have the option of placing the awning under the lid and snapping it down tight or attaching it on the outside of the complete shelter. With this method, you can snap the cover

(roof) off and on for easier cleaning or replacement. Tucking the sides of the awning in cup shaped and duct taped will be warmer and safer. **Always use dark materials that are less noticeable and camouflage when necessary. Black or dark brown spray paint can be used on the container if indicated rather than covering the sides with plastic.**

Install the shelter off the ground on bricks, trellis, cement blocks, wood, or anything that will provide a sturdy platform a off the ground. Make sure the shelter is steady and up against something firm. If this cannot be done put cement blocks on the top and sides to secure it in place.

Measure and cut carpeting for the bed inside. Place the reflector material, cut to size, on top of the carpet or other material placed on the bottom the shelter. Several layers of fleece on top for the winter and towels in the summer. Towels hold dampness, so should not be used in the winter and wet months, but they are easy to launder and good for the summer. Fleece has been the best and warmest material for the beds. It dries very fast and does not hold moisture. If there are several layers, the cats can scoop them up into a warm and cozy bed.

SHELTER FOR TWO OR MORE WITH STORAGE CONTAINER PLACED ON THE SIDE: Use 25-45 gallon Rubbermaid plastic storage container is placed on its side, with the opening facing you. The lid will not be used for this shelter. Purchase a storage drawer, the type used to store bedding under the bed, about 4-6 inches in height that will perfectly fit into the opening of the storage container when placed on its side. You now have a large plastic storage container and a drawer 4-6 inches in height sliding completely into the opening. In the 40-gallon container, there is enough room for 3-4 cats in the drawer cuddled up.

Make a plastic shade and duct tape it to the front of the opening, just to the bottom of the drawer. Measure the shade **in about one-inch** to allow adequate opening on either side for the cats can get in and out easily. This will give the shelter a safer and warmer opening before you install the larger and heavier awning. **Begin making the larger awning, as with the previous shelter. The awning being 10-12 inches longer can also be draped close against the opening with a brick holding it in place. Make sure the cats can enter and exit rapidly and there are no tight areas on either side. Because of the larger opening with the container on its side, the inside plastic shade is important to be in place and hanging in front of the opening before the large awning is installed, up off the ground.**

Putting wood, cement blocks or other materials on the ground in front of the opening to keep the bedding drier and cleaner, providing a threshold that will cover the mud and puddles of water. There are many innovative ways to provide shelter that is safe, warm and dry. Plan ahead carefully. After the shelter is ready, put a little catnip or special treats inside to lure them in. If you are so inclined, a prayer for the beloved occupants could be said.

Experience has taught us 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. Occupants of apartments and homes change ownership and occupancy. There can be construction and other circumstances that change the environment – so daily visits to the home site is essential.

MATERIALS THAT CAN BE USED FOR SHELTERING:

Plastic storage containers (Rubbermaid type 25 gal) with snap on lids
Plastic storage drawers 4-6 inches in height
Foam insulated boxes (need to be weighed down)
Reflective insulation material for warmth
Wooden boxes, milk crates, discarded materials for innovative construction
Plexiglas can be cut to size and rectangular or tent-like shelter can be made with wooden flooring from wooden pallets.
Dog igloos
Covered litter boxes. Reduce the size of the hole and cover in black plastic and make awning.
Discarded or purchased shelter-type materials
Dumpsters in certain locations are an excellent source for shelter materials
Lucite sheets or rolls for covering large areas for waterproofing and awnings
Small nails, staples and gun
Lots of black duct tape
Black and Silver Tarps, Heavy duty plastic material in rolls or garbage bags
Reflector material or linoleum are good insulation for the bottom of the beds
Fleece bedding for the winter and light weight materials the summer

In colder climates, additional insulation will be required.

FEEDING STATIONS: If you are feeding feral cats away from your home, feeding stations will be necessary to insure that all of the cats are being fed, not just those that show up when the caretaker arrives. It is important to insure that the cats have plenty of nourishment and this can be accomplished with wildlife in mind, if it is an issue.

Feeding stations should be out of sight and protected from the elements. Use the same criteria as the shelters for keeping the stations out of public view. Plastic storage containers with awnings are good protection for the feeders and water containers. There are dozens of way to set up feeding stations to accommodate the feeders and water containers. Create a feeding station large enough for at least one cat to go completely in and eat without getting wet. Cleanliness is essential in all areas. Refer to Feeding Instructions for Feral Cats.

“It never ceases to amaze me at how the cats instinctively gravitate to their shelters. Even when they are placed at some distance from there they usually hang out, as soon as they are finished and in place, the cats will begin using them. I have seen the cats sit and watch me install shelters (from a distance) and as soon as I leave, they are inside investigating. If there is a little nook, barely big enough for one cat, create a cozy shelter. Shelters provide the feral cats with a crucial component for them to survive out of doors. Feral cats value their shelters.”

“Shelters can also provide a means to move the cats away from hazardous conditions, into a safer more protected place. In moving shelters and feeding stations to safer areas, you will be offering the cats a chance for a better life. It has been a rewarding experience to observe their sleepy faces and dry coats as they come out of their shelters and go to their food. On those cold and stormy nights when I am cozy in my bed, I sleep better knowing I have done my very best to provide them with a loving place to rest their little heads.”

**Dona Cosgrove Baker
President and Founder**

www.feralcatcaretakers.org

See our sheltering and feeding stations on U-Tube

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