

Setting Humane Traps

In a Nutshell

- Borrow or rent traps as soon as possible. If possible use a non-spring based trap like a Tru-Catch humane trap. Many shelters and rescues loan or rents traps.
- Set and cover the trap near the latest sighting. If it is an indoor only cat, set the trap in a **concealed** location by the door or window that he exited from.
- Use smelly bait like tuna or sardines and make a trail of pea-sized pieces leading into the trap.
- Check the trap frequently. If possible, check from a distance.
- Avoid moving the trap often. Keep it in place for a day or more unless you have a sighting or reason to believe the cat is someplace else.
- Leave the door or window open so the cat can re-enter on their own. After dark is best. If you tie a string to the door, you can close it without spooking the cat. Click here for PDF [directions](#) from Tru-Catch. A link to a video tutorial can be found at www.felinefinder.org/resources.

One of the best tools for retrieving a displaced cat is a humane trap, especially if they are set as soon as possible and kept consistently baited. Yet people are often reluctant to try this. One



reason we often hear is that they are afraid of trapping owned pets or local wildlife. That may happen, but it is easy to turn them loose. (See the appendix: Trapping Wildlife.) Another reason given is that they want to wait first and see if the cat comes back without using a trap. This is a mistake. If you set the trap immediately while he is still in the area, your chances of getting him back are much higher. As days pass, your cat may move or be scared out of your yard by another animal or even by your search efforts. The trap

needs to be close to where your cat is hiding, so he can smell the bait. Setting the trap in the first day or two gives you the greatest chance of placing it near your lost cat. And if you don't set a trap, you can't trap your cat!

What Kind of Trap Should You Use?

Most cat trappers prefer to use quiet, Tru-Catch style traps. These use gravity instead of springs to close the door and have rings that prevent the door from lifting when it closes. There are two advantages to using this type of trap.

- First, they are safer than spring-style traps that close with force and can occasionally catch a tail or leg as the cat goes in.
- Second, when triggered, they make far less noise. If a cat accidentally triggers a spring-based trap or witnesses another cat go inside, the loud sound may scare the cat off and deter him from going in again.

How to Set the Trap

1. Place a single layer of newsprint or thin cloth like a pillow case on the bottom. Some cats don't like to walk on the wire bottom. **Don't** let it extend over the trip plate or it may get stuck underneath and not trigger the door closing mechanism. Avoid towels or thick layers of newsprint that may interfere with the trip plate.
2. Cover the top with a towel or bedding from your home. If you have one that you or your cat has been using, that is even better. To reduce the stress on your trapped cat, extend the cover over the door too so the trap will be completely covered when triggered. Just be sure it isn't dangling over the edge where it might prevent the door from closing completely.
3. Make sure the trap is in a level location and no rocks, branches or other obstacles will prevent the door from closing all the way. Most traps have a friction-based lever that is attached to the trip plate. When the cat steps on the trip plate, the door closes. To set a Tru-Catch trap, pull the two rings up and hold the door open with one hand. Twist the trigger rod so the trip plate lifts. The curved end will rest against the trip mechanism.



4. Choose a smelly bait like tuna so the cat can detect the odor from a distance. If your cat has a favorite food that isn't smelly, use it **in addition** to the tuna. Roast chicken works well for some cats and some cats like sardines or KFC original recipe chicken. If you aren't sure, try them all! Put the bait on a paper towel or small piece of cardboard. Bowls and cans are not a good idea because they can get stuck under the trip plate and prevent it from working. Make a trail of pea-sized food from outside the trap to the back of the trap. *In our area, raccoons seem to prefer dry food over the wet food, so avoid using kibble as bait if you are in an area with a high raccoon population.
5. Once you have placed the trap, added the bait and set the trigger, use a stick or pen to test the trip plate to make sure it goes off. If it doesn't, make sure there isn't anything under the trip plate. Adjust the trigger mechanism if needed.



Where to Set the Trap

As in real estate, location is everything when it comes to trap placement. A cat lost in unfamiliar territory will instinctively lay low. Some cats will literally hunker down and hide for two or three weeks without making a sound or moving at all. However long the cat remains hidden, her first movements away from her hiding spot are likely to be under cover of dark and close to buildings, shrubs, cars or other objects that conceal her location. If you watch a feral or shy cat move, they tend to skirt the sides of buildings or follow a line of shrubs to get from one location to another. So, when choosing where to place the trap, try to think like a scared cat. Here are some tips.

- 1- **Place the trap near the point of exit from the house.** If that location is too open or visible, choose the closest covered spot. Or, make your own cover. Leaning a piece of plywood against the house or moving a chair with a towel draped over it will provide natural cover as the cat moves from his hiding spot towards the trap or back to the door he exited from. Avoid making a lot of noise when you do this so you don't spook him. Remember, he's most likely very close by.
- 2- **If you can't place a trap near where he exited the home or have a second trap to set, choose a place near cover, not out in the open.** Feral, shy or lost cats have great survival instincts and will avoid crossing open areas unless there are no other options. Cover might be bushes, a deck, cars or anything else in their environment that they can hide under or behind. If there is a house, fence or other structure nearby, place the trap flush with the wall. Choose an area that is partially concealed and protected from the elements. And make sure there is at least a cat-sized path around the trap's location.



A trap next to a building is better than out in the open, but this trap is still fairly exposed. Concealing the trap behind something will make it safer from human interference and more appealing for a cat.



This trap is in an area with a lot of shrubs and ferns. If the ground is level, you can completely conceal a trap with natural vegetation. Just be sure that the door isn't blocked. This trap could be made less visible by pushing it under the vegetation or covering it with brush.

- 3- **Avoid putting traps in an area where their exit could be blocked by a predator or territorial cat.** Cats like to have an escape route and don't like being cornered. If they don't have a clear escape path, they may avoid the trap and choose to go hungry.

- 4- **Leave the trap in the same location for a few days so the cat can get used to it.** A common mistake is to move the trap every day or even every few hours. Cats don't like change, so be patient. It takes some cats a few days to get used to the trap's presence and hungry enough to go in. Too many changes in the set-up will make the cat suspicious and less likely to go in the trap. If your cat is spotted elsewhere or you have a better idea of where he is, it is okay to move it or to add another trap in the new location, but don't move it in the first few days unless you have a reason to do so.

Things to Try if the Cat Won't Go in the Trap.

1. Find out if someone in the neighborhood is feeding outdoor cats. If there is other food available, the cat is less likely to go in the trap. Go door to door and ask homeowners if they know anybody who has cats or who feeds cats outside. Chances are good your cat is eating there. Often, the owners don't even know they are feeding a spare. If someone is feeding, ask if you can set up a wildlife camera pointing to the food bowl. If they seem reluctant, make sure they know that they are welcome to preview the video first. You just want to know if your cat is there.
2. Contact a rescue organization and see if you can borrow a drop trap or a coyote trap. This is helpful if you have a trap-wise cat who is reluctant to go in again.
3. Add catnip to the trap or try other types of bait. Some cats like roast chicken and a few cats have been trapped with KFC chicken. To safeguard neighborhood dogs and other wildlife, be sure to remove the bones.
4. If you have been trapping with the cover on, try removing the cover and see if that makes a difference. Sometimes, just having the back side open is enough to give the illusion of an escape hatch.
5. If the cat will go to the trap, but not all the way in, try locking it open for a few days with a bungee cord or carabineer. Add an exorbitant amounts of tasty food and let the cat get used to the trap being a safe place to eat. After the cat is going in all the way, set the trap.



Keeping the Trap Safe

1. Animal lovers may be suspicious seeing a trap and imagine that something bad is going to happen to the captured animal. Traps have been stolen by well-meaning people who jumped to the wrong conclusions. Put one of your missing cat's flyers on the trap.
2. Use a bike lock to secure the trap to a tree or fence.
3. Make sure you have permission from property owners to trap on their property.