

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) for Community Cats: The Basics

We've all seen cats sunning themselves on the grass, playing in alleyways, or sleeping on a neighbor's porch. These are community cats, also called feral cats. They are unowned and unsocialized to people, and therefore unadoptable. They live full, healthy lives with their colonies in their outdoor homes. Community cats and people benefit from TNR, the humane, effective, mainstream approach to addressing cat populations. Anyone can do TNR—these basics will get you started.

Trap-Neuter-Return

TRAP: Humanely trap all the cats in a colony.

NEUTER: Take the cats in their traps to a veterinarian or clinic to be spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and eartipped.

RETURN: After the cats have recovered from surgery, return them to their outdoor homes where they were trapped.

STEP ONE: PREPARATION FOR TRAPPING

Before you begin trapping, make sure to connect with neighbors. Let them know what TNR is and how they can help. Determine how many cats you'll be trapping, and be prepared with a plan for different or unexpected scenarios like nursing mother cats, kittens, and

ill or injured cats. Establish a feeding schedule for the cats so they become accustomed to getting food at a consistent place and time every day. It's important to coordinate with a community cat-friendly veterinarian or clinic for spay and neuter appointments and to set up a holding and recovery area for the cats in advance.

STEP TWO: TRAPPING

Ensure you have the number of traps you need, and that they are labeled and working properly. Withhold food for 24 hours before you trap, but always provide water. Cats should be hungry enough to enter the traps, but shouldn't eat too much once inside them, since they'll be having surgery. Bait the traps with food like sardines or tuna in oil.



For full instructions visit alleycat.org/TNRGuide.

STEP TWO: TRAPPING (CONTINUED)

Place the traps on a flat surface where the cats spend time. Then move away, but always keep an eye on them. When one or more cats are trapped, carefully approach the traps, and cover them completely with a towel, blanket, or trap cover to help calm the cats. The cats will be frightened so reducing stress is extremely important.

When you've finished trapping, don't forget to count your traps before you leave to make sure they are all accounted for.

AT THE VETERINARY CLINIC

Transport the cats to the community cat-friendly veterinarian or clinic where they will be spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and eartipped. Confirm with the veterinarian what services you want, like microchipping, or don't want, like testing for FIV or FeLV. (Learn why at alleycat.org/FeLV-FIV.) Make sure the clinic has your contact information and that they contact you before making any treatment decisions for the cat.

STEP 3: POST-SURGERY

Let the cats recover overnight in the area you set up or at the veterinary clinic. Keep them covered in their traps to reduce stress. Monitor the cats to make sure they are recovering properly. If you suspect any complications or observe any vomiting, bleeding, or difficulty breathing, call your veterinarian immediately.

STEP 4: RETURN

Return the cats to the exact location where you trapped them, so they can return to the outdoor home they know and reunite with their colony. Provide food and water, and resume their usual care routine.

YOU DID IT!

Thank you for helping to improve the lives of community cats. It's compassionate and committed people like you who make a huge difference in your communities.

For full instructions visit alleycat.org/TNRGuide

Our website is alleycat.org, where you can also find links to our active social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok, LinkedIn, X, Bluesky, and Threads.



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