

## Tips for Hard-To-Trap Cats

From Alley Cat Allies

<https://www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/tips-for-hard-to-trap-cats/>

When you're practicing Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), you may find cats who are particularly difficult to trap. Cats are cautious, clever, and crafty, and the savviest among them will figure out ways to avoid being caught. Some cats will be too suspicious to ever enter the trap, and some will figure out how to nab the bait in the trap without triggering the door.

Check out Alley Cat Allies' tips and tricks to help you trap even the most trap-shy cats:

Get cats comfortable with the trap. Feed trap-shy cats out of unset traps in their normal feeding locations for a week or two before trapping again. They'll start seeing the traps as a comfortable, safe place to get a meal. Start with the food right by the entrance of the trap and gradually move it closer to the back each day.

Use a larger trap. Cats don't like to feel trapped or boxed in. A larger trap with a taller opening and wider sides can be more inviting to a cat wary of entering an enclosed space.

Cover the trap. By throwing a dark towel over the trap, without blocking the door, you create a space that looks dark, hidden, and safe to cats. Cats will be more enticed to enter the trap to hide away. (Or try disguising it by placing it in a paper sack or even inside a cardboard box. Cats love boxes and paper sacks. It works! Suggested by someone else).

Withhold food. Consider withholding food for 24 hours or up to two days, but no longer. A hungry cat won't be able to resist the yummy bait in your trap. Never withhold water.

Try a more exciting bait. Something extra smelly and tasty, and perhaps out of the ordinary, might pique a cat's interest. We have lots of suggestions for safe and tasty treats! Try jarred baby food, canned mackerel, or chicken.

Make a food trail. Coax wary cats into the trap with a trail of tiny food scraps leading up to and then inside the trap. Gradually increase the size of the bait

scraps as you place them on the trigger plate and beyond. Make sure you don't use too much; you don't want the cat to get full before she reaches the trigger plate! You can also try using the smelly broth of canned cat food or meats as your bait trail.

Change the trap's location. Move the trap to a quieter, protected place so the cat feels safer going into it. The more secluded, and the less people around, the better.

Observe habits. Just like you have paths you walk every day, so do community cats! Be observant and watch for the trails that cats most often take. Note if there's a certain tree or bush they like to sleep under, and what time of day they're most likely to be in a specific area. Set up the traps at these places and times.

Use distraction techniques. Some cats can be guided into a trap with a laser pointer, which you can control from a distance. Or try hanging a piece of cooked chicken from a string above the trigger plate to trick the cat into springing the trigger.

Camouflage the trap. Try covering the trap with natural material like burlap. Then, place leaves, small branches, palm fronds, or whatever is in the natural environment around the top, sides, and on the floor inside the trap. Just make sure your disguise doesn't interfere with the trap door closing! Run a test before setting it up for the real deal.

Hide the trigger plate. A cat may have learned to recognize the plate that closes the trap door and how to avoid it. To keep her from tiptoeing over and around the plate, try covering it, and a bit of the trap floor in front of and behind it, with newspaper or cloth. Or cut a piece of cardboard a little narrower than the width of your trap and a couple of inches longer than the trigger plate. Duct tape the cardboard to the middle of the plate and loosely to the floor of the trap. The cats won't be stepping around that trigger so easily!

Put a stick in it. For cats who have learned to step lightly to avoid triggering traps, slide a stick through the side holes of the trap just in front of the trigger plate and a few inches off the trap floor. The cat will be forced to step over the stick and her paw will land harder on the trigger plate just beyond it, springing the trap.

Spring the box trap yourself. Prop the box trap door open with a stick or a full water bottle with string tied around it. Use enough string so you can hide a few feet away and hold the end of it. When the tricky kitty walks into the trap, pull the string to manually shut the door.

Use a drop trap. If the standard box trap just isn't doing it, try using a drop trap. It's a large mesh box that you prop up and trigger manually with a rope or string. Make sure to set the drop trap on flat ground and to have a partner, as the traps' size makes them awkward to handle alone. Prop the trap up with a wooden stick or a full bottle tied with string, leaving enough string so you can hide a few feet away and hold the end of it. Bait the trap with plenty of food just in case cats you don't want to trap wander in before your target. Don't spring the trap until your target cat is inside; if she sees other cats being trapped, she'll stay away! Once you've sprung the trap and caught the cat you want, immediately place a sheet over it and get a box trap ready. Transfer the cat to the box trap to easier hold and transport her.

Lure the cat into a more confined space. It's easier to trap when you don't have to do it in the great outdoors! Place food into a smaller space you can close in on, like a garage or shed. Hide and wait for the cat to enter, then shut the door behind her. Before you lure kitty in, get the room ready. Clear the space of any possible hiding places, then lean a single large board against a wall. Set up a box trap and hide it behind the board. When the cat is locked into the smaller space, she'll immediately try to find the nearest hiding spot. Since you only left her one option, she'll dart behind the board and possibly right into the trap.

Place traps side-by-side. If your hard-to-trap cat likes to circle around the back of the trap instead of entering it to figure out how to get the food, use that to your advantage. Place two box traps right next to each other, with their entrances facing opposite directions. When kitty circles around one trap, she may walk right into the one set up beside it.

Use a mother cat's kittens to trap her. Kittens are a powerful lure for avoidant mother cats. If you manage to trap her kittens first, put them in a carrier or another box trap and place its door against the back end of the trap you plan to use to catch mom. Place a dark sheet or towel over everything but the entrance of mom's trap. Mom will think she's seeing her kittens through a dark tunnel and will enter her trap to get to them. If it's chilly out, keep the kittens warm by lining their carrier or trap floor with a towel and placing a couple of hot water bottles beneath it.

Go high-tech. If a shy kitten or a mother cat refuses to enter a trap, your cellphone may just help you out. Find a video of kittens meowing and play it on your phone, then place the phone at the back of your box or drop trap. Kittens who are scared and alone may race to join the “other kittens” in the trap. The mother cat may think her kittens are calling for her and enter the trap to find them.

Take a break from trapping. Unless the cat is in need of immediate medical attention, take a break for a week or two. Give yourself and the cat a rest, and then try again. You’ll get her eventually!

### What Not to Do

The last thing you want to do while trapping is put yourself or the cats in danger. Even if you’re frustrated from failed attempts to trap a cat, never resort to the following techniques.

DO NOT use trapping equipment other than humane traps. You could injure or even kill a cat with alternate trapping methods. Also, do not use trapping equipment specifically made for other animals.

DO NOT try to catch a cat with your hands. Even the most socialized cat can panic when grabbed, and can scratch or bite you. You can also harm the cat in the attempt if she struggles to escape you.

DO NOT withhold food for more than 48 hours before trapping. It’s dangerous to a cat’s health to go without eating for more than two days.

DO NOT withhold water. This will not help you in your trapping efforts. Instead, you can do harm to cats’ health and wellbeing.

DO NOT give up! Be patient, persistent, and clever. If you keep trying, you will get that cat into that trap.