

Tips for Successful Trapping of Trap-Shy Cats

Cats can become trap-shy—frightened to go near or enter a trap, or trap-savvy—mastered the art of removing food without triggering the trap. Don't be discouraged. There are several unique but straightforward techniques to humanely trap hard-to-trap-cats.

[Conduct Trap-Neuter-Return Guide »](#)

Tools

[Drop Trap Instructions »](#)

[See a List of Drop Trap Options »](#)

- **Get the cats used to eating out of the trap.** A short break can reduce a cat's fear of the trap. During this time, keep feeding that cat and others in unset traps for about a week or more before trapping again. Feed the cats in the same place and time as always. Load the trap the opposite way you normally would, so that the food is in the front of the trap and the front door is closed, because you do not want the trap set. Take off the back door or tie it securely open. Place the food by the entrance of the trap, then inside, then over a period of days gradually move it closer to the back. Feed in the same place and time as always. Monitor the traps while the cats eat to ensure traps are not stolen or a cat is not accidentally trapped. The cat will see other cats eating inside the traps and will likely try it as well. When you are ready to trap again, withhold food for 24 hours.
- **Try using a larger size trap.** Some cats may be more comfortable entering a larger trap, which has a taller opening and wider sides.

- **Make the trap more enticing.** Consider using the following smelly treats as bait:
 - Bits of jarred baby food (not containing onions)
 - Catnip
 - The pungent herb valerian. Make a strong-smelling broth by boiling Valerian Root in water, and then douse the trap with it.
 - Other types of bait, depending on what you originally used, such as “People tuna” in oil, mackerel, canned cat food, sardines, anchovies, or cooked chicken.
- **Use distraction techniques to help coax the cat onto the trigger plate.** You may be able to guide some cats into a trap with a laser pointer. You can use a pointer from quite a distance away, too. Another distraction technique is to hang a piece of cooked chicken from a string above the trigger plate. The cat will likely need to step on the trigger to reach the chicken.
- **Place the trap in a more secluded location or camouflage the trap.** Moving the trap to a quieter or more protected location can raise the cat’s comfort level enough to enter. Or, you can try to blend the trap in with its surroundings. First, hide the trap under a bush, under a leaning piece of wood, or in a box so the cat feels like he is entering a dark hole. To further disguise the trap, cover it with branches, leaves, camouflage material, burlap or other natural materials. Even simply covering the trap with dark cloth or a towel can do the trick. Be sure that the coverings you use do not interfere with the trap door closing.
- **Withhold food for up to two days.** For a particularly trap-savvy cat, you might consider withholding food for up to two days, but do not withhold food for any longer. Never withhold water.
- **Spring the trap yourself.** It is possible to manually spring the trap. You can do this by propping the trap door up with a piece of wood or soda bottle and tying a pull string to it. When the cat you want enters, simply pull the string to close the trap. Be sure you practice first.

- **Use a drop trap.** If you are still unable to trap a cat or if the cat has learned how to steal bait without springing the trap, consider using a drop trap, which does not rely on a trigger plate to close the trap door. Drop traps allow you to catch a cat without having to force him into a confined space. These traps are generally large, mesh covered squares that, when triggered by you with a rope, fall down over the cat. All drop traps allow you to easily transfer the cat from the drop trap to a regular metal trap. Using a drop trap is often a last resort, because it either requires you to build or purchase your own or find one to borrow. Also, using a drop trap is cumbersome enough that it normally requires the help of another trapper. [Read these instructions for building a drop trap. Purchase Alley Cat Allies' Collapsible Drop Trap.](#)

Take a break from trapping. If a cat will not go into a trap after repeated attempts, take a break for a week or two (except in the case of an injured cat). The trap-shy cat needs to be reconditioned to not be afraid to go in the trap. It is important to stop trapping until you have trapped the trap-shy cat. Continuing will most likely result in the cat becoming increasingly reluctant.