

WINTER TNR TIPS

Staging and Transporting

Remember that **temperature control** during cold weather is a must. Stage your cats before and after surgery in a warm and dry location. Potential areas include heated garages and shops, basements, bathrooms, and laundry rooms.

Always **transport cats inside a temperature-controlled vehicle**. Keep the cats covered to help them remain calm. Use a shower curtain or other impervious plastic sheet to line your vehicle area, cover with potty pads or newspaper, place the traps on top, and cover them with blankets or sheets.

Use **rice socks and insulating sheets** to help keep the cats warm in their traps during staging and



transport. Heat socks filled with rice in the microwave, place on top of the trap, then cover with an insulating sheet (foil side down), and finally with a blanket or other cover. If you are TNRing one or two cats, you can also use Snuggle Safe discs or other microwaveable heating pads.

Never place traps on top of electric heating pads or blankets. There is always a potential for overheating, electrical malfunctions, and other problems.

Elevate the traps on a table or other structure to help the cats maintain body heat. Never place the traps directly onto a concrete or other hard-surface floor.

You can **create a warm space in a larger space** by using tarps to create the smaller space and aiming a small electric space heater into the space to provide warmth. Be sure to allow for adequate air flow and to check to make sure the temperature is not too hot or cold.

Trapping

Prepare for the most effective trapping by creating **a feeding station and schedule**. Provide food and fresh water at the same time in the same place for at least two weeks to establish a pattern. Cats will eat more during the colder weather and will be more likely to visit the



feeding station routinely for sustenance. This will make it much easier for you to trap cats on schedule, and will ensure that they are well-fed in advance of the stress of trapping and surgery.

Ensure that the cats have **adequate shelter** so that they have a safe and secure place before and after TNR. Along with daily food and fresh water, this will help the cats to be in the best possible physical condition before surgery and will give them somewhere quiet and safe in which to return after their post-operative recovery period.

Use the snow to your advantage! If you are unsure about the cats' locations as you evaluate the colony and are planning for a trapping project, **follow footprints** to help identify areas the cats frequent. You may need to set up traps at some point along those traffic areas for some cats.



Cover baited traps with a blanket or heavy towel. If some precipitation is in the forecast, you can place the trap inside a large heavy duty garbage bag with holes punched in the back to allow for air flow, then covered with a blanket or towel. If there is no precipitation in the forecast, you can place traps inside of paper lawn/leaf disposal bags. You can also place the baited traps onto sheets of cardboard to protect and insulate.



Never leave traps unattended. Monitor the status of trapping from your vehicle or structure, immediately cover and remove trapped cats, and place them in your warm vehicle or staging area. You can trap in colder weather but you must immediately remove and place the trapped cats in a warm staging area or vehicle.

Do not trap if **extreme weather** is forecast. Most free-roaming cats will shelter during winter storms and are unlikely to appear for trapping, even if you have set a feeding schedule.

Recovery

Depending on the weather conditions and their access to sufficient shelter, you may want to give the cats extra time before returning them to their outdoor home but they do not require additional time under normal circumstances.

Females generally can be returned in roughly 48 hours. Having prepared for the process with sufficient nutrition and shelter, they should have a good coat and adequate body fat to compensate for the small area shaved before their surgery and, when returned, are insulated from the cold inside their shelter. Males can be returned in roughly 24 hours.

Other tips from advocates:

- If travelling to a spot away from home for trapping, prepare the bait and traps in advance in a warmer area, then transport the pre-baited traps for a quick set up.
- Likewise you can pre-warm the bait on a plate or in the can on your car's heating vent before placing in the trap at the trapping location.
- Try various kinds of bait that may last longer in the cold weather, including treats and dry food. Catnip is another potential cold-weather bait.
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TNRing in Winter Prevents Suffering and Death

Winter trapping presents some additional challenges, but these are easily overcome with a little extra planning.

Remember, cats begin the reproduction cycle at the winter solstice, which occurs in late December. By January, many females are already pregnant, and by March virtually all are.

Those caretakers who avoid TNR in winter will certainly see colony expansion and suffering among its members. TNRing in the winter months prevents many litters of kittens from being born in late winter and early spring -- some at a time when they will almost certainly die shortly after birth due to exposure. You will also prevent many females, including very young and inexperienced females, from the significant physical stress of reproducing during a time of year that adds considerable extra challenges to an already dangerous process.

Food and Water

Here are some great tips from advocates for keeping food and water unfrozen during the winter months if you don't have access to electricity for heated water and food bowls.

From Jade Vazquez of Neighborhood Cats

Start with two small, new litter boxes. Next place three hand warmers at the end of one box, then put the empty litter box into the first one. Finally, put wet food at the end of the top box directly over the hand warmers. Add dry food at the other end. Because no cold air is reaching the hand warmers, they'll keep food from freezing for up to six hours!



From caretaker Kimberly of Franklin County

With the handy heated rice bag in the bottom of one bowl and the food in another on top, the wet food stays warm a bit longer for the stragglers. All bowls bought at Walmart in the large pet container/dog treat area.

From caretaker Molly of Schuylkill County

Slow and/or stop water from freezing by spraying insulation foam around the dish.

Be prepared to use the foam up once you start because, once opened, it does not stay viable for very long. Use a large flat tool to spread the foam and remember that the foam expands significantly.



An approach we experimented with during some really cold temperatures in January 2018



Insert a thick plastic bowl into a foam lid, carved out for the bowl's bottom about an inch deep with about one inch remaining to insulate from the ground. Wrap the sides of the bowl with three layers of insulating sheet, foil side in. (We cut the sheet from an insulating bag that came with a shipment of food for the holiday.) Add five handwarmers, then drop another bowl with water into the larger bowl and on top of the handwarmers. (The inner water bowl here is the bottom of a take-out container, which fits snugly into the outer bowl.) You can adjust for different sizes of bowls. This lasted for seven or more hours, with a temperature range of from 10-21 degrees.