

OUTDOOR CAT SHELTER AND FEEDING STATION IDEAS

In cold weather, shelter is actually more important for stray and feral cats than food. Even though feral cats build thicker coats for winter, they can quickly succumb to hypothermia, particularly in rain & snow when their fur gets wet and doesn't insulate as well. Also, stray and feral cats are more prone to parasites, respiratory infections and minor illnesses. Combined with cold, wet weather, these relatively minor maladies can quickly prove fatal. In emergency situations in winter, if you do not have quick access to a shelter, provide a temporary solution until a more permanent shelter can be obtained. It's more important to do something to protect the cats from the cold and elements than to wait for "the right" shelter.

Cardboard Box Shelter

In a pinch for just a temporary fix, even a cardboard box is better than nothing - tape the top closed and cut out a hole in one side for a door. Tape a piece of plastic (cut out from a large trash bag) onto the top. Put newspaper on the bottom and, if possible, place the box under something to protect it further from rain - a piece of wood leaned against a fence, under a tree, etc. If possible, raise the box off the ground where it might get wet.

Styrofoam Cooler Shelter – cost \$6

An adequate shelter for one cat can be made from a simple Styrofoam cooler available at any hardware store for about \$6. Glue the lid onto the cooler, turn it upside down and cut a hole in one side (anywhere but in the middle of one of the long sides). The Styrofoam containers used to ship meat can be turned into shelters in the same way and can, depending on their size, house 3 to 4 cats. If you want to get fancy, get a large Igloo cooler and, with a jigsaw, cut a hole towards the left or right of one of the long sides. The attached lid will allow for easy cleaning.

Plastic Bin Shelter – This innovative idea costs around \$15-20.

- Finding one plastic bin to fit inside another is the most challenging part of this project.
- The larger bin was \$6, the smaller was \$4. A 4x8 sheet of Styrofoam insulation costs about \$7, and is enough for 2 shelters with some left over.
- After the cats have begun using the shelters, you might add a door flap made of clear vinyl or heavy plastic.



Feral Villa – Cat Shelter - \$49.95

The Feral Villa has two levels – a “labyrinth” type lower level to keep out wind and water and an insulated upper level that allows the cat’s body heat to be retained during cold weather.

See www.feralvilla.com for more information.



Insulation

The cats' shelter will be warmer and cozier if you put loose insulating material inside. The material must be dry and loose, so that the cats can burrow into and underneath it. Straw is the preferred bedding because it does not hold moisture. Do not use blankets, towels or folded newspaper. Because the cats can only lie on top of these materials, they actually draw out body heat and defeat the purpose.

In extreme cold, consider a “Snuggle Safe” micro disc for cats. It is a plastic disk about the size of a Frisbee that can be heated in your microwave for 5-7 minutes and stays hot for 12 hours. Wrapped in a cloth the cats can’t open, the disk is great for providing warmth inside their shelters. Snuggle Safe is available through Petsmart (Item No. 451284, \$19.99). Order online at www.petsmart.com or check your local Petsmart store to see if they have them in stock.

Placement of Shelters

Cat shelters should be placed in an inconspicuous area on your property, away from people or high traffic. Shelters and feeding stations should be placed so that cats do not cross roads or neighbor’s property to move back and forth from shelter to food/water. Provide enough shelters to house all the cats in the colony.



Rubbermaid storage bin converted into covered feeding station

PHOTO BY NEIGHBORHOOD CATS

Feeding Station

Create a small, partially enclosed feeding site to make food/water bowls and the cats themselves less visible, and to prevent food from getting wet and spoiled during rain or snow. Place the station away from people or high traffic areas where they may create a nuisance.

