

# CARING FOR FERAL CATS IN WINTER

**Donated Digs:** Ask your community to donate storage bins (like Rubbermaid). Line the bins with Styrofoam, cut out a doorway and voila! Instant shelter.

**In a Pinch, Raid the Trash:** A cardboard shelter is better than no shelter. To keep it from getting wet, elevate off the ground, line with newspapers and cover the lid with plastic (a garbage bag will do).

**That's Heavy, Man:** Use sheets of plywood to weigh down lightweight shelters made from plastic, cardboard, Styrofoam, etc.

**Cuddling Kitties:** Cats rely on body heat to stay warm, so keep your shelters small for colonies with just a few cats. For more populated colonies, go with multiple shelters of a larger size.

**Warming Trends:** Because it resists moisture, straw is the top choice for insulation and bedding in your feral cat shelters, says Alley Cat Allies. Avoid blankets, which absorb moisture like a sponge.

**Clean & Clear:** Yes, cats can get snowed in, so it's important to remove snow from all entrances and exits to their shelters. Shovel regularly to stay ahead of the game.

**Not Worth Their Salt:** Alley Cat Allies cautions against using salts and chemicals designed to melt snow near your colonies. They can be toxic when licked off paws or ingested from melting puddles, and can hurt a cat's paw pads.

**Fill 'Er Up:** Note that extreme cold weather can increase a cat's energy and nutritional needs. Don't forget extra water to prevent dehydration.

**"Wet" Their Appetite:** Per Alley Cat Allies, wet food in insulated containers is ideal for cold-weather feeding—because it takes less energy to digest, that's more energy for keeping warm.

**Keep Water from Freezing:** Purchase \$20 fish tank heater (Petco or PetSmart). Higher the wattage the better, but the more expensive. Fill a big no-tip dog bowl with water. Place heater in the bowl. Then place on top a smaller bowl with water. Looks and acts similar to double boiler/heater. I take the extra measure and place a Super Hot Hand pouch in the top bowl. Check frequently.



# BUILDING A FERAL CAT DEN

*Shelters keep feral cat colonies comfortable in cold and other harsh or severe weather conditions. Placing discreet shelters in quiet locations away from foot traffic helps keep cats from taking shelter in places where they are in danger or not welcome.*

**There are endless variations of cat shelters. Here are a few tips to help you get started:**

□ A good size for a shelter is at least 2'x3' and at least 18" high. Larger shelters are not necessarily better, since heat disperses quickly, leaving the inside as cold as the outside.

□ Cats will huddle together inside for warmth, so provide colonies with multiple shelters that can fit three to five cats each. If you are caring for fewer cats, use a smaller shelter so it takes less body heat to warm up.

□ Make sure the door is no bigger than six to eight inches wide to keep out other animals. If you're modifying a dog house, you'll need to block off part of the door to make it cat-sized. A flap on the door will also keep snow, rain, and wind out.

□ Insulate the shelter with straw to repel moisture and keep cats warm and dry (Note: Make sure it's straw, but not hay, because hay absorbs moisture. Blankets may seem like a good idea, but since they are also extremely absorbent, they make bad bedding.

□ Raise shelters off the cold ground to conserve warmth. Wooden pallets stuffed with insulation work well for elevating shelters and keeping out drafts.

