



**Our mission is to create a community without homeless pets by providing high quality affordable spay neuter and medical services.**

TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN (TNR)

Question #1: My neighbors (or the landlord) are complaining about the outdoor community cats. What can I do?

Talk to your neighbors (or the landlord) in a non-confrontational and calm manner. Find out what their complaints are (too many cats, yowling, spraying, etc.) and make sure they understand that spay/neuter can resolve most of them. Explain that spay/neuter prevents unwanted litters and reduces or eliminates most undesirable behaviors such as yowling and spraying because these behaviors are associated with breeding. Make sure they understand that removing the cats does not solve the problem because new cats will just move in, and that TNR reduces the number of outdoor community cats over time because it prevents more litters from being born.

When a cat is spayed/neutered through TNR, ask the vet to “eartip” the cat (a standard and humane practice used nationwide) so you can easily identify which cats have already been trapped and fixed.

Question #2: I’ve been told that cats should be indoor pets so isn't it cruel to leave them outside?

The safest place for your companion cat is indoors, but the only environment suitable for feral/wild cats is usually outside. Feral cats that have gone through the TNR process and live in managed colonies with a volunteer caretaker – who provides food, water and shelter – can live healthy, content and long lives. Finding homes for feral cats is not a realistic option. Animal shelters rarely accept them because they cannot be touched by people and are thus “unadoptable.” If they do accept them, they are usually euthanized without a holding period. Relocation of the cats should only be done as a last resort, circumstances when the cats’ lives are in danger. Moving a colony of feral cats – and convincing them to stay – is a complex process involving specific procedures that start with finding a suitable new habitat or location, and must be followed without shortcuts if you want the cats to be safe and remain at the relocation site.

Question #3: Why should veterinarians eartip outdoor community cats?

Eartipping is a way to identify outdoor community cats that have been spayed/neutered and vaccinated. It’s an immediate, visual way to ID cats that have gone through the TNR process, and it alerts animal control that the cat is part of a managed colony with a volunteer caregiver. It also helps the colony’s volunteer caregiver track which cats have been trapped, fixed and vaccinated, and it identifies newcomers who have not been fixed. Eartipping is safe and painless because the cat is under general anesthetic when the procedure is performed. Eartipping is a standard and humane practice that is used nationwide.

Question #4: Do I need to have outdoor community cats tested for Feline Leukemia (FeLV) or Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV)?

We do not advocate for universal testing of outdoor community cats. We take this position based on the recommendation of Alley Cat Allies and the experiences of large outdoor community cat programs like Operation Catnip (in Florida and North Carolina) which has stopped testing all together. Results at their clinics indicate: • The percentage of outdoor community cats infected with either FeLV or FIV is very low: 3 – 7% are infected with FeLV and about 2 – 5% are infected with FIV. These percentages are about the same as the percentages for indoor cats. • Testing produces a significant rate of false positives so healthy cats are frequently misdiagnosed and euthanized. • The cost of testing outweighs its benefit and diverts resources from spay/neuter. FeLV is most likely spread from a female to her young through her milk. FIV is most likely spread by unneutered males fighting over females and territory (behaviors associated with breeding). If more cats are spayed or neutered, the spread of FeLV and FIV will be greatly reduced. When resources are limited, we recommend using them as effectively as possible by spaying/neutering more cats rather than spending money on expensive tests that may not be accurate. The single most effective way to help control the feline homelessness crisis and improve the health and living conditions of outdoor community cats is to increase the number of cats that are spayed/neutered. Despite the concern over viruses, it's euthanasia due to homelessness that ends more lives than any feline disease. Outdoor community cats that have gone through the TNR process and live in managed colonies with a volunteer caretaker – who provides food, water and shelter – can live healthy, content and long lives.

Question #5: Cats in the colony I care for were spayed/neutered, but how do I know they are recovering properly?

When an outdoor community cat is spayed/neutered, he needs to stay overnight at the veterinary clinic or in a home where he can be monitored for a least one night. If you choose to keep the cat in your home or garage, keep him in his trap with clean newspaper underneath. Keep the trap covered with a sheet or towel and leave him alone, except to check on him. Avoid reaching into the cage unless absolutely necessary and wear protective gear if you must do so. A feral cat that is coming out of anesthesia may still react fiercely by scratching and/or biting. Spay Neuter Charlotte keeps cats overnight for one night. Male cats can be released back into the colony the day following neuter surgery. However, Spay Neuter Charlotte recommends, if possible, keeping a female cat in a safe, temperature controlled placed for one extra day for a total of 48 hours. Female cats that were pregnant may need to be kept longer based on our veterinarian's recommendation. If you have a double door trap, open the back door that slides open a crack and slide the food and water in. You can also pour food and water through the wire cage if there are already bowls inside the trap. Normal behaviors during recovery include deep sleep, head bobbing, wobbly movements, fast breathing and shivering. Bleeding from the left eartip is also normal but should stop by the following day. Abnormal behaviors during recovery include continued bleeding from the surgery area, vomiting, difficulty breathing, not waking up and grogginess for more than 48 hours after spay/neuter surgery. If a cat displays any of these abnormal behaviors, call the clinic that performed the spay/neuter surgery immediately.

Question #6: I've been trying to trap a cat, but the cat won't go in the trap. What should I do?

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). A short break can reduce a cat's fear of the trap. During the break, feed the cat and other cats you are feeding in unset traps (use a zip tie to hold the trap door open) for several days. Start by placing the food by the entrance of the trap, then move it inside, then move it to the back over a period of several days. Feed in the same place and at the same time as always. The cat will see other cats eating inside the traps and will likely try it too. When you are ready to trap again, withhold food for 24 hours. Never withhold water. You can make a trap more enticing by using really smelly food such as mackerel tuna or catnip: drizzle a very small trail leading into the trap and place a chunk in the back of the trap (the cat will step on the plate that closes the trap door on its way to the back of the trap for the food). Cats also love the smell of a pungent herb called valerian. You can make a strong smelling broth by boiling valerian in water and then douse the trap with it. Camouflage the trap with branches and/or leaves. Line the trap floor with leaves. If all else fails, use a drop trap (a large and lightweight frame covered with netting). It is propped up on one side with a stick, and food is placed in the back. The trapper stands at a distance, holding a string attached to the stick. When the cat walks underneath to eat, the trapper pulls the string, allowing the trap to drop and capture the cat(s). The trapper immediately covers the drop trap with a blanket to calm the cat(s) and then carefully transfers her into an individual trap.

Question #7 There's a pregnant outdoor community cat outside. What should I do?

Unless you are willing and able to bottle feed, socialize and find homes for the kittens, we believe that the most humane option is to spay the pregnant mother cat. It is very hard to place kittens (especially unsocialized ones) in local animal shelters because there is an overpopulation of cats and most shelters are operating at capacity. According to Alley Cat Allies, seven out of 10 cats who enter shelters nationally are killed there. Spaying a pregnant female cat also ensures that another generation of kittens does not grow-up on the streets. If you trap the mother and a veterinary clinic determines she is about to give birth, work with the clinic to set-up a safe, warm area for her to have her kittens in. The kittens are more likely to survive if they are born indoors, but the mother may experience stress from being confined and become less able to care for her kittens. To reduce her stress, provide a warm, secluded, quiet area for her to give birth and nurse her litter. If you cannot trap her, or if she seems about to give birth outside, provide a warm, outdoor cat shelter so she can choose to have her kittens in it. It is best to leave her alone and not bother her while she has her kittens. Any additional stress may cause harm during the pregnancy.

Question #9: Do outdoor community cats need shelter?

Yes, like almost all living creatures, outdoor community cats need warm, dry shelter to protect them from extreme temperatures and wet weather. Winter cat shelters are available for purchase at local pet stores. You can also build a wooden shelter or a Rubbermaid one yourself or use a strong box or crate insulated with waterproof material thick enough to keep out wind and cold. It's not a good idea to put blankets in the shelter because they can get wet and become frozen, so use waterproof materials like straw (not hay!) to insulate the shelter instead. Cats generally want their shelter and the area where they go to the bathroom to be separate, so you do not need to put a litter box in the shelter. Igloo style dog houses – available at many pet supply stores or on Craigslist – also make excellent outdoor community cat shelters. A large shelter can provide a safe haven for more than one cat. Thanks to Alley Cat Allies for providing much of the above information. Please visit [www.alleycat.org](http://www.alleycat.org) or

[www.feralcat.com](http://www.feralcat.com) for even more information on outdoor community cats and TNR programs. Spay Neuter Charlotte staff can walk you through the TNR process and the process of becoming an outdoor caregiver.