



WORKING CATS

The Dumb Friends League sometimes has cats come to our shelter with histories and temperaments better suited to an outdoor lifestyle and a full-time “job”. Cats that end up in this program are:

- Stray cats with a strictly/primarily outdoor history and very little or no contact with humans.
- Cats with very high energy levels which make it difficult/frustrating for them to live in a home.
- Cats that are shy/fearful of people and prefer the company of other cats and animals.

Our working cats *tend* to fall into one of two categories:

- **Semi-feral** – a cat that has had some contact and experience with humans and has developed a comfort level with humans due to feeding, receiving medical care or similar contacts, but is unsuitable as an indoor pet. Like social cats, semi-feral cats make good companions for other outdoor animals, but will likely spend more time hunting for rodents, and less time with humans.
- **Feral** – a cat that has lived strictly outdoors and has never been socialized with humans. They are not aggressive when left alone. A feral cat may become more semi-feral in nature in a consistent environment.

*On RARE occasion, we will have cats that fall into the following category:

- ***Social** – cats that are familiar with humans and actively seek attention, but only tolerate so much attention when given. These cats likely had some sort of indoor/outdoor history, and tend to get frustrated when confined to a smaller space (i.e. a shelter environment). These are cats that are highly likely to solicit attention/pets, follow you around a barn/outbuilding, or even spend time in a home with you, but will still need you to respect their body language and freedom to choose their level of interactions. Due to their somewhat “flirty” behavior, cats that fall into this category can be more likely to show aggressive behaviors when pushed too far, so please be sure you are comfortable reading cat body language if you are hoping to end up with this type of working cat.

All working cats receive spay/neuter surgery, a microchip ID, age-appropriate vaccinations, FeLV/FIV testing, and a rabies vaccination prior to placement.

Preparing for Your Cat(s)

Item checklist for your new working cat(s):

- ✓ Food/water dishes (stainless steel or ceramic are suggested, and heated water dishes can be helpful during winter months)
- ✓ Cat food – dry food is essential, wet food as a bonus
- ✓ Litter box / litter
- ✓ Hiding spaces (cardboard boxes, cat carrier, etc.) for acclimation period
- ✓ Soft blanket, towel, or cat bed

Suitable homes for these cats are barns or safe, heated outbuildings. They will depend on their new owners for basic care and overall health. **Cats are unable to live on rodents alone and must be given food and fresh water daily.** While cats may end up preferring to do their business outdoors, please always provide a litter box and scoop it daily to prevent waste in unwanted areas.

Please visit <https://alleycatadvocates.org/communitycat-care-center/creating-winter-shelters/> for much more detailed descriptions and tips on constructing shelters for outdoor cats.

Acclimating Your Cat(s)

After adoption, these cats should be placed in a tack room, another secure indoor enclosure/room they cannot escape, or an introduction pen (i.e. an extra-large wire dog crate) for 2-4 weeks in order to acclimate to their new surroundings. This enclosure should ideally be located within the building or area the cat will be calling home.

You will need food and water, a litter box, and a soft blanket or cat bed set up inside the enclosure. Going in **daily** to change out the food and water, and to clean the litter box is vital. Cats tend to stick around where resources are, so getting them used to a routine during the acclimation period leads to greater chances of the cat(s) sticking around once they are given full freedom.

After the 2-4 weeks are over, simply open the door to the secured room where the cats have been living or open the crate door (use a bungee cord or something similar to make the door stay open and not accidentally swing shut) and simply walk away. Give the cat the ability to choose if/when they are ready to start exploring. Do not force the cat out.

Tips:

- Providing your cat(s) with a scoop of wet food around the same time every evening can help lure them back into the barn or outbuilding if you would like them to come back every night.
- Consistency and routine are very important during the acclimation period. Feed and change litter around the same time every day if you are able to.
- Water should be kept clean, and full.
 - Please be aware of outdoor temperatures and be sure the water is not frozen.

Post Release Care

Caring for your cat or cats after release should include:

- Feeding during daylight hours; gauge the amount of food so minimal food is left over to attract wildlife in the evening. You may want to consider taking the food bowl in at night.
- Recruit help for days away, rather than leaving an automatic feeder to provide for the cat(s). Automatic feeders and automatic water devices may also attract wildlife.
- You may be able to wean the cat(s) away from using the litter box, but, if the weather is bad, you might want to consider leaving a litter box as an option during those times.

Thank you for your interest in our working cat program. Never hesitate to reach out to our employees involved in the working cat program if you have any questions/concerns. You can reach them by phone at 303-751-5772, or by email at workingcats@ddfl.org.