

Feral Cat Winter Shelter

The Neighborhood Cats Winter Shelter-

Originally designed by Karin Hancock of Port Washington, NY, our favorite feral cat winter shelter has many advantages. The two-inch thick hard Styrofoam is excellent insulation and traps the cat's body heat, effectively turning the feline into a radiator. Air space is purposely limited, so there is less volume to be heated. Typically, 3 to 4 cats can fit comfortably inside, although more might curl up on a severely cold night.

The shelter is lightweight and should be weighed down. Best is to place two shelters about a foot apart with the doors facing each other. Bridge the gap by laying a piece of plywood across both roofs. Now the shelters are fully protected against the elements.

After the cats have begun using the shelters, you might try adding a flap door which the cats can easily pull back. A piece of a vinyl mat will do, attached by drilling (or poking) two holes above the door opening and using plastic nuts and bolts (like those used to attach toilet seats). Never place water inside because it could spill and get the cats wet, threatening their health.

Materials include an 8-foot sheet of hard Styrofoam (usually pink), a few linoleum floor tiles, a tube of silicone sealant and deck paint. Average cost will likely be in the range of \$30 to \$40 each. Ideally the Styrofoam will be cut with a table saw in order to keep the edges of the pieces straight.



Neighborhood Cats
Winter Shelter

The CSM Stray Foundation Winter Shelter

Here's another idea inspired by the [CSM Stray Foundation](http://www.csmstray.org/) <http://www.csmstray.org/> in Kew Gardens, Queens:

Materials needed are: a large Rubbermaid storage bin, an eight foot by two foot sheet of one-inch thick hard Styrofoam, a yardstick, a box cutter or utility knife, and straw, shredded newspaper or other insulating material. Then assemble as follows:

1. Cut a doorway six inches by six inches in one of the long sides of the storage bin towards the corner. To prevent flooding, cut the opening so that the bottom of the doorway is several inches above the ground.
2. Line the floor of the bin with a piece of Styrofoam, using the yardstick and box cutter to cut out the piece.
3. In similar fashion, line each of the four interior walls of the bin with a piece of the Styrofoam. Perfect cuts are not necessary. Don't make the Styrofoam go all the way up to the top of the bin, but leave a uniform gap of at least three inches between the top of these Styrofoam "wall pieces" and the upper lip of the bin. There needs to be room for an interior Styrofoam "roof" to fit.
4. Cut out a doorway in the Styrofoam where it is lined up with the doorway that has been cut out already in the storage bin. Trace the outline of the doorway on the Styrofoam first before cutting.
5. Stuff the bottom of the bin with straw or other insulating material to hold the Styrofoam interior wall pieces in place.
6. Cut out a Styrofoam "roof" to rest on top of the Styrofoam interior wall pieces
7. Cover the bin with its lid.



The CSM Winter Shelter

This shelter can be cleaned by taking off the lid and the Styrofoam roof. It's also lightweight and may need to be weighed down. A flap over the doorway is optional. Catnip can be sprinkled inside at first to attract the cats.

Other Alternatives

Spay and Stay of Lake County, Illinois, offers detailed plans and photos on its website for making inexpensive winter shelters from two Rubbermaid storage boxes: <http://www.spayandstay.org/wintershelter.htm>

Animalkind of Hudson County, NY, provides photos and instructions on its website for converting Styrofoam packing containers into cold weather shelter: <http://www.all-creatures.org/ak/feral-shelter.html>

An adequate shelter for one cat can be made from a simple Styrofoam cooler available at any hardware store. 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 five to six inch round hole towards the left or right of one of the long sides. The attached lid will allow for easy cleaning.

In a pinch, 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.

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 best, while shredded newspaper will also work. The worst are 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. Hay, because it's moist, can become moldy and some cats are reportedly allergic to hay and can develop nasal sores. But do keep in mind, if you use insulating materials, you must be able to change them regularly in order to ensure they stay dry. If you can't, it's better to not put anything inside the shelter.

Extreme Cold

Claudia Allen of Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, lines the interior walls of her styrofoam shelters with a Mylar reflective blanket, which can be bought at survival stores as thermal safety blankets for people (in case your car gets stuck in the cold.) The Mylar reflects the cat's body heat back onto him and can make the difference in extreme temperatures, particularly in the more northern states and Canada. Claudia also uses an outdoor heating pad in the shelter and an electric dish that she reports keeps water from freezing as low as minus 38 degrees F. These items can be found at <http://cozywinters.com> Caretakers have reported the Mylar blankets are also effective when laid on the floor of the shelter. They don't absorb and take away body heat like ordinary blankets when a cat lies on top, but instead reflect heat back. That's why they're sold as emergency blankets for car travel in wintertime. Mylar blankets can be purchased at a cost of \$1.50 each from Healthy Harvest. Go to <http://www.healthyharvest.com> and do a search for "Mylar Blanket."

**Information from Neighborhood Cats –

http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/HOW_TO_FERAL_CAT_WINTER_SHELTER