

Personalities of Barn Cats

The personalities of barn cats vary from cat to cat. Some cats will warm up over time and eventually may even let you pet them. On the other end, some barn cats are rarely seen, making themselves scarce in the day when people are around. In the middle, barn cats may sit and watch people, keeping a safe distance. Some of them will befriend other animals, such as horses. We have had cats sit on horses, sleep with ducks, etc. **Please tell HHPR if your barn cat becomes friendly and wants to live in the house, as we will find it a home as a housecat, unless you choose to take it in your home.**

Feral cats are not aggressive unless cornered and threatened. Trying to grab and pet them, for example, may lead to someone being scratched or bitten. In general, feral cats should be left alone unless they start coming up indicating they want to be petted. Take their lead. The best way to form a bond is to regularly talk to the cat and have a regular feeding routine. Canned food is useful for getting the cats to feel a bond with their feeder.

In general, barn cats learn to ignore dogs but free-roaming dogs should be discouraged from chasing the cats. Children should not be allowed to chase a feral cat either but should be taught to leave them alone and watch them from a distance.

Veterinary Care

The first rabies shot is good for one year, and subsequent shots are good for three years. Feral cats can be brought to the vet in Hav-a-Heart traps (available for loan from HHPR). Such traps can also be used if the cat shows up lame or ill. Most feral cats are very hardy and can work through most colds and limps caused by sprains or strains, which will gradually improve on their own. Vet care is general needed for open wounds, broken bones, noticeable weight loss, hair loss, or colds (runny eyes, sneezing) that don't go away. Contact HHPR if you need advice on trapping your feral cat.

If You Move

Contact HHPR if you make plans to move and need help taking your cats or can't take them. The best option would be for the new owners to continue feeding them. If that won't work, HHPR will have to rehome them to a new barn.



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GUIDE TO ACCLIMATING YOUR NEW BARN CAT

Congratulations on adopting a barn cat. You have helped a feral (undomesticated) cat who might otherwise be homeless or euthanized gain a new lease on life.

Here are guidelines on how to help your cat acclimate and what you can expect afterwards.

Acclimation/Kenneling Period

To allow the cat to acclimate to his new surroundings, he needs to be contained in either a secure area like a tack room or in a large wire kennel, which HHPR can loan. The kennels are large enough to hold a carrier that the cat can use as a hideaway, a litter box, and food and water dishes.

The purpose of the holding period is to allow the cat to get used to the physical environment, the sound of your voice, other animals and people, and the feeding routine.

Number of days in kennel: The recommended number of days in the kennel is 5-7. The length will depend on how the cat adapts to the kennel. Some cats are overly stressed and may not eat or may frantically scratch to get out. In those cases, 4-5 days in the kennel would be more humane. Also in the winter in a relatively cold barn about 4 days will suffice. Consult with HHPR if you have any questions.

If the cat can be let loose in a secured room or a shed where it has more room to move about, the holding period should be extended to several weeks.

Placement of kennel: If possible, the kennel should be placed in an area where the cats can feel secure while also observing some of the activity of the barn, for example, along a side of the barn where they can watch horses going by but have some privacy in their corner. A blanket (or sheet in the warm months) should be draped around part of the kennel so they do not feel overexposed. In warmer months, the kennel should not be placed in direct sun or a place that quickly heats up.

In winter, the kennel should be placed in the warmest part of the barn or where there is sunlight, and hay bales should be stacked outside the kennel, with loose hay also placed inside. Heavy insulating blankets should be used to cover the entire kennel at night and part of it during the day. The number of days in the kennel may be shortened to 4 in the winter so the cats can move around and find the warmest spot in the barn or outbuilding. At all times, the kennel should be in a well-ventilated area with no exposure to noxious fumes.

Cleaning the Kennel: The litter box should be scooped daily. It is usually easy to work around the cats because once someone comes up to the door they run and hide in the carrier, and generally stay there until you leave.

Releasing the Cats

The kennel door should be opened during the evening or whenever it is relatively quiet, so the cats will feel free to come out and explore. Their food and water should be placed relatively close to where the kennel was. If the food needs to be moved to a different location it should be done so gradually, a few feet at a time, so the cats will be aware of where it is.

Upon release, some cats hide for days or longer. You can determine if they are there by the amount of food eaten. You can also put flour around the food dish to check for paw prints, and in the winter you can check for prints in the snow. Some cats will leave the premises temporarily, exploring the surrounding area. **Because of this, you should always continue to feed at first even if the food is not being eaten.** We have had instances of cats disappearing for months and then showing up again. It is recommended to continue feeding for at least a month, and stop then if there is no sign of the cat, but remain alert in case the cat shows up in the future. In the end, a certain percentage of rehomed cats will disappear after release, despite all efforts.

Feeding the Cats

The cats need fresh dry food and water daily. If possible, the food should be placed off the ground, or the highest level in the barn, to deter other critters from getting at it. Feeding in the morning also helps with this.

Type of Food: The dry food should be non-generic and with as little dye as possible (since dyes cause problems for some cats). Regular Purina Cat Chow is one good choice.

Canned food is recommended while they are in the kennel and for the first few weeks after release so the cats think this is a *really* good place to live! It can then be gradually weaned, such as every other day for a while and then less frequently. If served as a treat every few days, it definitely helps entice the cats to stay.

Feeding Routine: Some cats will begin to gather once they know the feeding routine. It is an important way to establish trust with the cat, which may turn into the cat coming closer to you over time. Cats fed canned food in particular learn the routine and are often waiting at feeding time.