A GUIDE TO BUILDING
FERAL CAT SHELTERS

brought to you by

FIVERcats

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If you're an animal lover like us, witnessing feral cats struggle to stay warm and dry during the winter can be heart-wrenching. That's why we decided to take action and build our own cat shelters. These plans will not be for everyone. To build these cat shelters you will need a well stocked workshop and experience. We don't claim that they are the best possible design, but are in no way the final say on feral cat houses. We don't claim that these plans are the best possible design. They are merely a record of how our cat houses were constructed.

When the cats seem to thrive outdoors, but as the weather gets colder, we find that they need a shelter to keep warm. Fortunately, our cat house design is waterproof, filled with dry straw, and has two entrances. With these principles in mind, it is possible to make a successful cat shelter out of almost any material or design. As well, but we needed to find the right design. Anyone who had taken the responsibility of feeding these feral cats needed to find the right design.

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About Community Cat Shelters

Seeing community cats outdoors in the elements can be heartbreaking. Of course we would love to bring each and every kitty safely indoors, but some cats are feral and prefer not to live with people. The neighborhood where we live has no shortage of community cats who were spayed or neutered, ear tipped and are cared for by neighbors. One of the main feeding stations for the neighborhood is in our backyard, where we feed anywhere from 1 to 4 community cats daily. Providing shelter for community cats is important in all seasons, but particularly as the weather gets colder.

Since we took on the responsibility for caring for the cats, it seemed only natural to provide shelter for them as well, but we needed to find the right design.

Feral cats require three main principles to feel safe using a shelter. First, the shelter must be dry. Second, the interior must be warm. Third, the cat must have two ways in and out of the shelter so they don't feel cornered.

To keep things dry it is important for the cat shelter to be off the ground and above the probable snow level with a watertight roof. To keep the cat house warm it is stuffed with straw, which the cat makes into its own little nest. Straw is the perfect bedding because it has a very low moisture count and is a good insulator. In particularly cold climates, Styrofoam sheet insulation can be added to the inside floor, walls and roof to provide extra warmth. The escape plan is solved by including a front and back entrance built into each cat house.

The other consideration that matters less to the cat and more to the cat caretaker is accessibility. For this reason the roof of our cat house design is on hinges and can be opened to change the bedding or to access a cat that is hiding.

With these principles in mind, it is possible to make a successful cat shelter out of almost any material or design. As long as your cat house is waterproof, filled with dry straw, and has two entrances you can help your local community cats weather even the harshest winters.

The following building plans are available for free to help provide cats in need with shelter. To build these cat shelters you will need power tools. If you are unable to build the shelter yourself, we recommend reaching out to a local carpenter or handyman who likely has many of the materials around from other projects. The shelters built from these plans should last for many years. You should clean the shelter and change the straw every year just before the weather turns cold.

If you are not able to build a shelter using these plans, there are many other options to purchase cat shelters or build a simple shelter out of Styrofoam or Rubbermaid bins. Alley Cat Allies has an extensive list of cat shelter options at all skill levels as well as pre-made: https://www.alleycat.org/resources/feral-cat-shelter-options-gallery/

In addition to providing food, shelter and care, the most important way to help cats is to get them spayed or neutered to prevent more homeless cats. The ASPCA has a search tool for free and low-cost spay/neuter options nationwide: https://www.aspca.org/pet-care/general-pet-care/low-cost-spayneuter-programs

FIVER Cats
http://fivercats.com
https://www.facebook.com/fivercats
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GETTING STARTED

MATERIALS:
- five 8 foot 2x4s
- one 8 foot 1x3
- one sheet of 1/2 plywood 4x8 feet
- one box of 2 1/2 inch coated deck screws
- one box of 1 5/8 coated deck screws
- one Roll of asphalt roofing material
- two heavy duty outdoor hinges
- one hook and latch set

ESSENTIAL TOOLS:
- tape measure
- pencil
- chop saw
- circular saw
- jig saw
- cordless drill
- chalk line

4x8 1/2 plywood

Cut pattern for cat shelter

Draw this cut pattern on your sheet of plywood with a drywall square and a pencil. Use a circular saw to cut out the sides, floor, and roof. Leave the front and back walls uncut. This extra piece will be used at a later stage of construction.
Cut four 2x4s at 18 1/2 inches for use as legs.

Measure the spaces between the legs. Cut 2x4 pieces to fit openings.

Measure down 1 1/2 inches on the side pieces. Strike a chalk line on the inside of the cat house as shown by the dotted line. This space will accommodate for a front and back entrance built into each cat house.

Measure the spaces between the legs. Cut 2x4 pieces to fit openings.

Drive 1 5/8 screws through plywood into legs.

File the piece on the inside of the roof overhang size place a pencil mark on the inside of the roof marking where the lid fits around the walls of the cat house. Plywood sides and cut 1x3s as shown to fit inside framing. Leave framing and 1 5/8 screws through plywood. When finished, sprinkle some catnip inside to attract ferals. Have the cat house in the open position. Cut pieces of roofing material to waterproof deck area staple neatly as shown in pictures. Wrap roof lid with roofing material as if wrapping a present. Staple underneath lid neatly. Use roofing material to waterproof deck area staple neatly as shown in pictures.
Drill pilot holes through legs as shown. Secure framing with 2 1/2 inch screws through pilot holes. Screw plywood down into framing with 1 5/8 screws. This should give you a nice solid base.

Attach side pieces as shown. Secure with 1 5/8 screws

Measure down 1 1/2 inches on the side pieces. Strike a chalk line on the inside of the cat house as shown by the dotted line. This space will accomadate for the roof lid.
Frame back exit. Measure between side pieces and cut cross brace out of 1x3. Level sides and screw in cross brace under the chalk line with 1 5/8 screws. Measure between cross brace and floor, cut 2x4s to fit. Drill pilot holes as shown and secure cross brace to framing with 2 1/2 inch screws. Repeat process with front entrance, but use a 1x3 turned on its side as a framing footer as shown.

Use scrap plywood to cut front and back walls of cat house. Measure between framing to determine size. Place wall boards against opening and draw cat house door with pencil. Cat doors should be 6 inches high and 6 inches wide. Front door is flush with the 1x3 on its side. Back door should be flush with cat house floor. Drill a starter hole and cut out door with jigsaw. Attach both walls with 1 5/8 screws.
Cut 2x4s as shown to frame the roof lid. Attach flush with sides using 2 1/2 inch screws through framing and 1 5/8 screws through plywood. When outside framing is complete measure inside length and cut 1x3s as shown to fit inside framing. Leave one inch space between 2x4 frame and 1x3. This gap will be where the lid fits around the walls of the cat house. Attach with 1 5/8 screws through plywood and 2 1/2 inch screws through pilot holes in framing.

Place roof piece temporarily on cat house. Plywood sides should fit nicely inside roof framing. Adjust overhang size to shelter porch area, but not restrict hinged movement. Once you have determined correct overhang size place a pencil mark on the inside of the roof framing. Next, mark where the end piece will go as shown in diagram.
Feral cats require three main principles to feel safe using a shelter. First, the shelter must be dry. Second, the interior must be warm. Third, the cat must have an escape plan so they don’t feel cornered. To keep the cat dry it is important for the cat shelter to be off the ground and above the probable snow level with a watertight roof. To keep the cat warm it is stuffed with straw, which the cat makes into its own little nest. Straw is the perfect bedding because as well, but we needed to find the right design. Anyone who has caught feral cats can tell you that these cats are wary of their environment. They are also creatures of habit and will use the same shelter day after day. Continued use of a shelter allows the feral cat to feel safe and comfortable using this resting place. The other consideration that matters less to the cat and more to the cat tender is accessibility. You don’t want to construct a cat house where an injured cat can hole up and not be rescued. For this reason the roof of our cat house is 19 inches off the ground. The front door is flush with a piece of plywood. This space will accommodate for the cat house floor. Drill a starter hole and cut out door with jig saw. Wrap roof lid with roofing material as if wrapping a present.

Lift lid off cat house preserving pencil marks. Cut 1x3s to fit between framing as shown. Screw in place with 1 5/8 screws through plywood. Use additional 2 1/2 in screws to toe nail the front piece in place.

Attach two hinges to the front wall at the fulcrum. Place the roof lid back on and line up the 1x3 cross brace with the hinges. Screw hinges into 1x3 cross brace attaching roof.
Wrap roof lid with roofing material as if wrapping a present. Staple underneath lid neatly. Use roofing material to waterproof deck area staple neatly as shown in pictures. Attach hook and latch to lid so roof doesn't fall when you have the cat house in the open position. Cut pieces of canvas drop cloth for use as door. Staple canvas pieces in place as shown in picture. Fill cat shelter with straw and sprinkle some catnip inside to attract ferals.
A Word on Feral Cat Shelters

About a year ago, we made a quick video about the care and maintenance of our feral cat houses. The response was overwhelming and the requests for building plans was ceaseless. The following diagrams are a response to this.

Feral cats require three main principles to feel safe using a shelter. First, the shelter must be dry. Second, the interior must be warm. Third, the cat must have an escape plan so they don't feel cornered. To keep things dry it is important for the cat shelter to be off the ground and above the probable snow level with a watertight roof. To keep the cat house warm a layer of insulation is required on the walls and floor. If you're an animal lover like us, witnessing feral cats struggle is a hard thing to watch. Since we had taken the responsibility of feeding these animals, it seemed only natural to provide shelter for them too.

FIVER cats

If you’re building a shelter for cats, the plans below should suit your needs. If you have an overwhelming need to construct, there are plenty more sites online with other tutorials. If you have a question or just want to say hello, you can email us at info@fivercats.com.

ESSENTIAL TOOLS:
- Circular saw
- Tape measure
- Chalk line
- Cordless drill
- Plywood
- Drywall square
- Wedge
- One hook and latch set
- Two heavy duty outdoor hinges
- One Roll of asphalt roofing material
- One box of 2 1/2 inch coated deck screws
- Two 8 foot 1x3s
- Five 8 foot 2x4s

Getting Started

MAKE A CUT PATTERN:

Cut four 2x4s at 42 inches each and three 2x4s at 48 inches each for the main frame. Cut four 2x4s at 14 inches for the front and back walls at 18 1/2 inches for the back walls. Cut 1x3s at 19 inches for front walls of the cat shelter and cut 1x3s at 14 inches for the back walls of the cat shelter.

Measure and mark:

Measure the space to be filled with dry straw and place piece of plywood against opening. Measure down 1 1/2 inches on the side pieces. Strike a chalk line on the inside of the cat house as shown. Measure between framing to determine size. Place wall boards against opening and mark end piece will go as shown in picture. Cut 1x3s to fit between framing as shown and secure cross brace to framing with 2 1/2 inch screws. Level sides and screw in cross brace under the chalk line with 1 5/8 screws. This should give you a nice fit openings.

Draw the cut pattern on your sheet of plywood with a pencil. Cut four 2x4s at 42 inches each to frame the roof lid. Attach two 1x3s to the back wall at the back of the cat house. Plywood sides will be where the lid fits around the walls of the cat house. Plywood sides should fit nicely inside roof framing. Adjust overhang size to shelter porch area, but not too much. Use additional 2 1/2 inch screws through pilot holes as shown and secure cross brace to framing with 2 1/2 inch screws. Measure the spaces to be filled with dry straw and place piece of plywood against opening. Measure down 1 1/2 inches on the side pieces. Strike a chalk line on the inside of the cat house as shown in picture. Draw cat house door with pencil. Cat doors should be 6 inches high. Place roof piece temporarily on framing. Adjust overhang size to shelter porch area, but not too much. Use scrap plywood to cut front and back walls of cat house. Measure be-

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