



Wisconsin Humane Society Care & Relocation Guidelines for Working Cats

Thank you for your interest in our working cats! We're excited, you're excited, and the cats, well, they need some convincing. Moving can be stressful, so the Wisconsin Humane Society has put together a guide to minimize stress and promote permanence for your new resident working cats.

About Working Cats

Generally speaking, working cats placed through our program are independent and prefer to limit their interactions with humans. However, the degree to which they keep their distance varies from cat to cat and may change over time. Even those who prefer to keep their distance may grow close with their caregiver after positive encounters with people. They often develop strong bonds with other cats, which is why we recommend that at least two cats be placed together.

Before Bringing them Home

Setup Required:

- A cat-proofed, enclosed space.
 - The area you select should be quiet and secure away from other animals – at least initially.
 - Large dog crates work well, especially if you do not have a small room available.
- A place for kitty to hide.
 - No need to get fancy; a sheet over half of a dog crate, a small plastic carrier, cardboard box, or even paper bag can provide the shyest of cats much-needed security.
- Food & water dishes.
 - In the case of freezing temperatures, you might consider investing in a heated water bowl.
- Litter pan & scoop.

Care Required:

- Providing daily food & water
- Routine litterbox scooping
- Compassionate and patient caretaking

Shelter. The Wisconsin Humane Society recommends that a working cat's new home be located a reasonable distance from heavy traffic and offer the cat protection from all that Wisconsin weather has to offer – barns, stables, and other enclosed structures make excellent homes for these cats. If a permanent structure such as a garage, barn, or stable is unavailable, a cat shelter should be built to provide protection from the elements. There are many resources available online on how to make your own inexpensive outdoor cat shelter. As a reminder, line any shelter with *straw* for insulation. Avoid using hay or blankets, which can trap moisture more readily.

Food & Water. While these cats may supplement their diets by providing organic rodent control for your property, they do require fresh food and water daily. As for food, the smellier the better – at least in the cat's opinion. Establish a regular schedule and location for feeding so the cats will

anticipate mealtime and return to that location. WHS recommends that you feed the cats during the morning hours, so as to deter wildlife from taking advantage of the free snack.

If you need to relocate their feeding area, do so gradually. The Wisconsin Humane Society recommends only moving their dishes a few feet at a time. If the dishes are moved too rapidly, the cats may leave thinking there is no food for them.

Seasonal Adjustments: Remember that with cold temperatures, wet food can freeze fast, so you may have the most success sticking with a dry kibble diet during the cold snaps. Wisconsin winters can get pretty harsh, so it is important to increase the amount of food offered during this time, as the cats will need more energy during cold weather. Also remember to invest in a heated water bowl to ensure the cats always have access to fresh water.

Litterbox. Litter pans should be scooped daily.

Caretaking. Most of the effort and patience required of the caretaker is put forth at the beginning, during the confinement period. After release, the caretaker's regular responsibilities include providing fresh food and water, scooping the litterbox, as well as monitoring the cats' health.

Moving Them In

The Transition. Once you have arrived home, transfer the cats from their carriers into their new confinement space. Your new residents will likely be a little panicked in their new environment – give them time and space. Many cats will start to settle in once they know no harm will come to them. If other animals must be nearby in the environment, introduce them very slowly so you don't frighten the cats further.

The Confinement & Acclimation Period

Why is confinement necessary? As the cats transition to their new environment, we recommend that they be confined for a minimum of four weeks. This period is dependent on trust built between each individual cat and the new owner, therefore it could be extended if needed (see directions below for release time). This confinement period will allow the cats to familiarize themselves with their new environment and recognize it as a permanent feeding station, which increases their likelihood of staying put rather than roaming off.

What can I do during this confinement period to promote a successful placement? Visit the cats daily but do not attempt to handle them – instead, sit nearby and talk to them in a soft tone so they begin to recognize your voice and overcome their fear of people. You can also slow blink at the cat (2-3 repetitions) and then avert your eyes to communicate that you are not a threat. Provide them with smelly canned food and quietly sit nearby while they eat, so they learn to associate you with food. Let's be honest, you're awesome, but in a working cat's world a delicious, consistent source of food is even better. Calling "kitty, kitty, kitty" or a similar phrase when you approach during this time will help so that after they are released, they will return when they hear you call.

♠*Tip from the Pros:* Leave a radio tuned to talk radio at a low volume in the area where the cats are confined. This will help them overcome their fear of people.

The Release

How will I know the cats are ready to be released from confinement? While the exact timing for release from confinement will depend on the individual cat, it's important that the cats recognize and trust you before releasing them from confinement. Some signs of trust include:

- Chirping, purring, social "talking"
- Making eye contact, soft blinking
- Approaching you
- Eating while you are present
- Playing with toys you toss toward them

Note: though the list above may sound characteristic of your average socialized cat, working cats will likely show their trust in a much more subtle or guarded way. Do not expect your working cat to suddenly solicit – or even tolerate – petting, holding, or other social interactions you might expect of an indoor companion.

They trust me. Now what? Once you've gained their trust, you can leave the door to their room, building, or crate open a bit and allow the cat to make the choice to leave on their own terms. But before you offer them that next step, make sure of the following:

- It's a quiet, low-key day at your place. No planned visitors, lawn-mowing, or other external factors that could scare the cats.
- It's daylight. Cats need to see where they are going in order to return.
- It's not raining. Cats will use their sense of smell to return.

Okay, they're free. How do I keep them coming back? Keep doing what you're doing.

- Keep good, smelly canned food available for them.
- Provide food and water for them on their usual schedule.
- Call "kitty kitty kitty" or the phrase used during confinement to signal for their return.
- Maintain a warm, dry shelter for them.

Adoption Steps

If you are looking to adopt a pair of working cats, please complete the following steps:

1. Fill out our [Working Cat Interest form](#)
2. Complete an [Adopter Profile](#)

A WHS staff member will then follow up with you as soon as we are able.

If you have further questions, please contact the campus nearest you:

Milwaukee Campus, call 414-264-6257

Racine Campus, call 262-554-6699

Ozaukee Campus, call 262-377-7580

Green Bay Campus, call 920-469-3110

Door County Campus, call 920-746-1111