

How to Acclimate a Barn Cat to your Property

Shelter Me, Inc. recommends a 5-week acclimation period.

You will need a large acclimation cage, such as a large dog kennel, to house each cat. The physical set-up of the barn is important because it determines where to place the cage. The cats need to bond with the new environment; they should be able to see people and farm animals coming and going from the barn. The cat(s) need fresh air and light; their cage should be next to a window or in a center aisle, or a busy tack room.

What do the barns need to provide in the way of supplies?

- Cat food – dry is essential; wet food is a bonus
- Large water bowl (a heavy crock-type bowl reduces spillage)
- Food bowls – separate bowls for wet and dry are ideal
- Litter – any kind
- Litter pan – the smallest you can buy, or a tin lasagna pan
- Soft blanket or cat bed – cats like soft places.
- If the cat is feral, definitely a little house for them to hide in; a small cat carrier or cardboard box with tall sides and an open top. Feral cats often drag bedding into the litter box, so place the bedding in the cardboard box or carrier.
- It is also helpful to cover the top of the cage with a blanket

Any other helpful tips about the acclimation process?

- The cats need to bond with their caretaker
- The cats need a regular feeding schedule; morning and night.
- The litter box needs to be cleaned every day
- The water needs to be changed every day
- Some people feed their cats wet food—specifically in the evening during the acclimation process and continue that practice after the cage door is open—to help ensure that the cat will return to the barn for the evening feeding and then they close the cats into the barn at night to protect them from predators.
- The barn owners can usually tell how well the acclimation period is going by how the cats react when they open the door to feed them. If the cats are settling in comfortably, they will brush up against the feeder's arm. (But this may *never* happen with really feral cats, even though they may decide to stay in your barn forever.)
- Even if cats are very skittish, it is often possible to pet them when they are eating – especially when they are eating something they really love – like wet food or tuna juice. If you have very, very skittish cats, try feeding them wet food on the end of a wooden spoon (as a friend-making gesture).
- Special food like tuna fish or juice is great, but commercial cat food contains nutrients that cats need for their diets.
- Cats like toys...we usually deliver the cats with a toy or two...but it is really nice for barn owners to buy the kind of rope or feather toys that allow them to interact with/play with the cats.

How do you recommend handling the “release” of the cats?

- After five weeks (some do less; we recommend five because we have seen it work many, many times), tie open the door of the cage in the morning after feeding the cats.
- Continue to feed the cats – in feed bowls in the cage – and continue to change the water and the litter regularly.
- If you have a barn that you can close up at night – please do so – it will help protect your cats from predators.