

## Introduction

**Barn cat programs** offer a humane and life-saving solution for feral or semi-feral cats who cannot adapt to indoor life. By relocating these cats to safe, managed outdoor environments like farms, stables, or warehouses, we provide them with a second chance to thrive while they offer natural, **sustainable pest control**.





**This guide provides a step-by-step framework for property owners and caretakers to ensure a successful relocation.**







Following these steps carefully is crucial, as a proper acclimation period is the single most important factor in convincing a cat to stay in their new home. Your patience and commitment create a lasting bond and a safe haven for these deserving animals.

## Part 1: Pre-Placement Planning & Setup Checklist


Thoughtful preparation is the foundation of a successful barn cat program. Before the cats arrive, ensure your property and resources are ready.

### Property Assessment & Caretaker Commitment

-  **Appropriate Shelter:** Do you have a secure, weather-proof barn, shed, or outbuilding?
-  **Safety from Hazards:** Is the area free from heavy traffic, predators, and toxic chemicals?
-  **Long-Term Commitment:** Are you prepared to provide daily food, water, and care for the cat's entire life?
-  **Veterinary Resources:** Do you have a plan for routine and emergency veterinary care?

-  **Food & Water Bowls:** Use sturdy, non-plastic bowls that are easy to clean.
-  **High-Quality Cat Food:** A consistent supply of dry kibble, with wet food for the transition period.
-  **Fresh Water Source:** Access to clean, fresh water daily. Consider a heated bowl for winter.
-  **Litter Box:** Needed only during the initial confinement period. Use a standard litter box and non-clumping litter.
-  **Hiding Spots:** A small carrier (door removed) or cardboard box inside the crate gives cats a sense of security.
-  **Permanent Shelter:** Insulated outdoor shelters filled with straw (not hay or blankets) for long-term warmth and protection.





### Essential Supplies Checklist

-  **Large Acclimation Crate/Enclosure:** A large dog crate or a secure, sectioned-off area in the barn is essential for the first few weeks.

## Part 2: The Acclimation Process: A Step-by-Step Guide

This phase is critical. The goal is to teach the cats that this new location is their home and you are a reliable source of food and safety. This process should last a minimum of 3-4 weeks. Rushing it is the most common reason relocations fail.

### Phase 1: Arrival & Confinement (Weeks 1-2)

-  **1 Arrival Day:** Place the cats directly into the prepared acclimation enclosure with food, water, a litter box, and a hiding spot. The space should be secure and comfortable.
-  **2 Establish a Routine:** Feed the cats at the same time every morning and evening. This consistency builds trust and teaches them to rely on you.
-  **3 Quiet Observation:** Spend time quietly near the enclosure. Speak softly to the cats so they get used to your voice, but do not try to pet or handle them. Your calm presence is enough.
-  **4 Maintain the Space:** Quickly and quietly clean the litter box and refresh food and water daily.

## Phase 2: Gradual Release (Weeks 3-4)

- 1 **Limited Freedom (When Possible):** Depending on the cats' temperament, limited freedom may or may not be an option. For semi-feral or socialized cats, after at least two weeks, you can open the door to their enclosure, allowing them to explore the larger barn or shed area. Do not let them outside yet. However, for truly feral cats, this step should be skipped entirely. These cats should remain crated for the full four weeks, or longer if needed, to ensure they feel secure in their new environment.
- 2 **Why Confinement Matters:** The 4-week confinement period is critical. During this time, the cats become familiar with the scent, sounds, and people in their new surroundings. They begin to associate this territory with food, water, shelter, and safety. Releasing them too soon, especially in an unfamiliar area, can trigger an escape response. In their panic to find their original home (which is often too far to reach), they may get lost, injured, or worse.
- 3 **Continue the Routine:** Whether confined or given limited freedom, keep feeding the cats in the same spot near their enclosure. This establishes the area as their safe zone and ensures they know where to return for food and comfort.
- 4 **Monitor Behavior:** If allowing limited freedom, observe the cats. Are they exploring confidently? Are they returning to the enclosure to sleep? These are signs they are starting to settle. For truly feral cats, patience is key—longer confinement will ultimately ensure a smoother integration.

## Phase 3: Full Integration (Week 4 and Beyond)

- 1 **The Big Day:** Once the cats are comfortable in the barn or shed, or after at least 4 weeks of confinement, you can open the main door to grant them outdoor access. Choose a calm, clear day, preferably in the morning before feeding time.
- 2 **Encourage Return:** Call to them and place their food in the usual spot at the usual time. Their hunger and established routine will encourage them to stay close and return to the barn for food and safety. It may take time for them to respond to your call, so be patient.
- 3 **Long-Term Support:** Continue providing food and fresh water daily. While they may begin hunting, consistent care ensures their health and reinforces their bond to the new territory.

By taking these careful steps, you increase the chances of a successful transition, helping the cats feel safe and ensuring they don't attempt to flee. Patience and consistency are key.

## Part 3: The Do's & Don'ts of Barn Cat Care

Your ongoing support is key to the health and happiness of your working cats.

### ✓ DO'S

- DO** provide fresh food and water 365 days a year. A well-fed cat is a better hunter and more likely to stay home.
- DO** use straw for insulation in winter shelters. Unlike hay or blankets, straw wicks away moisture and provides excellent warmth.
- DO** observe the cats daily from a distance to monitor for signs of injury or illness.
- DO** provide multiple shelter options if you have several cats, as they may prefer their own space.
- DO** be patient. Building trust with a feral cat takes time, and many will never become cuddly pets. That's okay.

### ✗ DON'T'S

- DON'T** release the cats from confinement too soon. A minimum of 3-4 weeks is non-negotiable for success.
- DON'T** stop feeding the cats, thinking it will make them better hunters. It will only make them leave to find a more reliable food source.
- DON'T** try to force interaction or pet the cats. Allow them to set the boundaries.
- DON'T** use blankets or towels for winter bedding, as they absorb moisture, freeze, and can make a cat colder.
- DON'T** relocate a single cat if they came from a bonded colony. It's always best to relocate at least two cats together.

Thank you for giving these cats a chance to live out their lives in safety and with purpose. Your compassion and dedication are what make humane solutions like this possible.

For more resources, visit the **CatWise blog at GILUCATS**. Every purchase you make helps **GILUFUNDS** support **TNVR** and rescue efforts for cats in need.