



Acclimating Your New Working Cat

You will need to confine your new cat(s) within your barn, outbuilding, or warehouse for a period of acclimation. This confinement stage allows cats to adjust to, and accept their new surroundings, whereas they may leave the location if let loose too soon. We recommend confining your new cat(s) within your barn or outbuilding for at least the first 2-4 weeks; however the confinement period can vary widely, depending on the cat. The longer you can secure your cat in this area during the acclimation period, the more likely your cat will be to stay near when released. If your new cat has been recently spayed/neutered, it is important to keep the cat confined for a minimum of 3-5 days, regardless of how quickly the cat seems to be adjusting to the new space to ensure the incision has begun to heal. Appropriate confinement would include a tack room, office, large wire crate, or any secure, sheltered enclosure that the cat cannot escape from. The crate or room should be large enough to include the following:

- Food and water
- Litter box
- Box or perch to hide in/under
- Bedding and/or straw for warmth and comfort
- Area for the cat to avoid human contact if preferred (and if available)

Depending on the time of year that you are acclimating your new cat, additional protection from the elements may be necessary. In colder months, straw should be used in and around the crate for warmth. Do not use blankets inside a crate, as they easily become wet and do not dry easily. Covering the top and sides of the crate will also help keep the area warm and dry; you may choose to use a sheet, blanket, cardboard or wood panels. Putting the crate on a platform of some sort, to lift it off of the cold ground, is yet another option. In warmer temperatures, the cat should have protection from the sun, and should not be allowed to become too hot.

During the confinement period, it is also important to establish a relationship with your cat. Daily visits to the cat, with offering of water, food and treats will establish you as a caregiver and provider. Offering treats and/or wet food is a way to form a bond with the cat and build trust. You may also sit at a distance and speak quietly to your cat. Try to minimize stress and handling of a feral/unsocialized cat during cleaning and care. Depending on the level of fearfulness, and the relationship you wish to have with your cat in the long-term, the cat may or may not wish to be pet or handled. It is important to go at your cat's pace when it comes to interactions. You will want to be cautious to not over-

stress the cat, causing more anxiety and fear, which could put your cat at risk of running off once freed from the confinement area.

After the confinement period, or once you feel that the cat is comfortable and acclimated to his/her new surroundings, it is time to open the door and allow the cat to come out at its own pace. Your cat may not come out right away, and you don't want to force him/her to come out. Some cats will come out immediately and quickly find another place to hide, which can also be normal. You will want to leave the crate or room set up as-is, with food, water, and a litter box for at least an additional week after allowing the cat to come out. You will also want to provide food, water, and a litter box in another area of the barn or outbuilding in case the cat chooses not to return to the provided crate. Once you notice that the cat is finding other places to hide/rest, you may start moving the food and water to a more convenient, permanent location where the cat feels most comfortable. At this time, you may also remove the crate. Even if you are hoping that your cat hunts mice or small animals, it is still important to provide plenty of food and water. It is natural for cats to stalk or kill prey, regardless of the food they are provided.

Introducing Your New Barn Cat to Other Pets

If you have other pets, it is important to remember that they may not get along right away. The confinement period is also when any resident pets can slowly get to know your new cat(s) by viewing and smelling the cat through the crate or other confinement area. If you are unsure of how your resident pet(s) will react to a cat, you will want to supervise to ensure that things are going okay. In some cases, interactions between the pets may need to be limited to when you are able to supervise, and pets may need to be kept completely separate until they become desensitized and adjusted.

If you have any questions or concerns during the acclimation period, please email Katie at kcook@toledohumane.org.