



## SUCCESSFUL BARN / GARDEN CAT ACCLIMATION

Thank you for saving the life of feral or unsocial shelter cat by giving it a fabulous barn or garden home! To help your new cat transition, please follow these important steps, and don't hesitate to contact the Bradshaw Animal Shelter Barn Cats Program if you have any questions.

### First Steps:

**First and foremost, think of the acclimation experience from a feral cat's perspective. If you were them, what would help you build trust in your new humans and make you want to stick around? What would make you fearful, unwelcome and want to take off?**

Prepare for success! Before adopting, ensure that you have the needed supplies and your set-up is ready for your new cats. This includes:

1. Appropriate shelter for the acclimation period, and for general access going forward.
  - ✓ Barn, garage, green house, shed, shop or other outbuilding. **Must have a roof/top, and windows or other natural light, as maintaining their circadian rhythm is important to reducing stress and for the benefit of their overall health.**
  - ✓ **Ensure the space has good air flow is temperature safe, and does not get too hot.**
  - ✓ **A dog crate is not an acceptable acclimation structure**, as it is too small to confine a cat for a long period, causing stress and frustration. This leads to lower immunity to illness, and only prompts a cat to escape the negative experience by running off after being released.
2. Food and water bowls
3. Quality food: both canned and dry
4. Litter box, scooper and litter
5. Bedding. Optional, and doesn't have to be fancy, just something comfortable to sleep on that can be washed as needed; old sweatshirts are fine!

Upon arrival, your new cats need to be set up in a safe and comfortable secure space within the acclimation structure for a minimum of two weeks, up to four or more in rural areas. Example, a tack room in the barn. One of our adoption team will guide you through the most applicable scenario based upon your capabilities and the needs of the cats. Be sure there are no ways for the cats to escape (screens, holes, loose boards, etc.). Ferals can be very crafty at finding ways to get out! The acclimation structure must be one you can easily get in and out of daily to feed/water, scoop litter, etc., without them escaping. While confined, your new cats must have access to a clean litter box (even if they will not have a litter box once released), and food and fresh water daily. By keeping your cats confined for this time, they will begin to associate the structure as "home base" so that once they are allowed free reign of the property, they will stick around, and know where to go for food and safety.

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### Safety:

Threats such as coyotes and birds of prey are common in rural areas. Therefore, it's important that the cats always have access to a safe place, especially at night. Often a small cut-out in the side of the structure suffices as an access point. Giving them access to high places such as rafters will afford them greater safety. It's strongly recommended that the cats be secured in their structure by dusk. Training them to return at this time is done by accustoming them to this being a normal feeding time. (See clicker training next page.)

### Integrating:

After the acclimation, open the area and let the cats explore. The first time you give your cats access to the outside, it must be daylight so they can better see the property, and you can monitor for any problems. This can be an overwhelming time for them, especially if there are large animals, dogs or kids running around; try to keep things as stress-free as possible when you first open the doors. Teach children to be respectful of the cats, and not to chase or yell around the cats. If you have other animals, your new cats will need time to adjust to living with them, as well. Given enough space and patience, most cats will transition into happy coexistence with other animals. Let your new cats and current cats work out their differences – sometimes cats need to hiss, growl, strike out or even scuffle a little to learn their place in the social order, and this behavior is normal. Watch all interactions carefully, and take care to avoid situations that truly put the cats at risk of injury, such as exposure to cat-aggressive/prey-driven dogs. **After the release, ensure 24/7 access to their living structure so they can seek safety at any time.** They should then think of it as home.

*Important! Do not release if it is raining or there is the potential for rain. Cats find their way back home by scent and rain will wash it away. Waiting a few more days will not hurt.*

### Feeding instructions, and more (Clicker Training):

Even though your new cats will be a valuable partners in rodent control, **it's important that you still give them access to food and fresh water daily!** Cats will not hunt more if you withhold food; they hunt for sport, so make sure you're helping your cats maintain their good health by feeding *quality* food. "Cheap" food can result in digestive upset, poor coats, and not provide optimal nutrition that can affect liver and kidney functions. **Give each cat approximately a ½ cup of dry food in the morning, depending upon their weights. At dusk, feed them wet food as this helps condition them to coming home in the evening for safety.** They may also need additional dry food at night. Always feed within their safe living structure.

Begin clicker training during the initial acclimation period using a dog training clicker (or ringing a small bell, or just shaking the food bag) at each feeding time, the sound of which they will learn to associate with food. After they're released, you'll continue to click, ring or shake in the evening (same time each day) to bring them back into the enclosed safe area for the night. Evening feeding of wet food is excellent enticement! Routine feeding times/places will also help keep skittish cats from wandering off the property. We have volunteers who can provide coaching on clicker training, just ask. It's very easy!

*Continued....*

**Note:** *If you want to move the feeding station, move it just a few feet each day until it's in the desired location. This will keep them from looking elsewhere for food and leaving the property. If you travel or will be away from home, remember to arrange for someone to maintain the routine and provide your cat with daily food and fresh water.*

### **Medical Care:**

As of adoption time, your adult new cat is up to date on vaccines (FVRCP and Rabies), spayed or neutered, treated for fleas and microchipped! If you've adopted a kitten 4-12 months of age, FVRCP boosters may be needed (consult your vet). If you have adopted truly feral barn cats, you'll probably not be able to touch them during their lifetime. If you find that one is in need of medical attention, you will need to use a humane trap to capture and take to your vet. **We strongly advise establishing a relationship with a veterinary hospital that will see feral cats before ever having to need their services.** Many "country" vets will often make house calls to provide medical services as best possible to barn cats. If possible, we recommend that you continue your cat's vaccination schedule as the years progress. Keeping your cat up to date on shots, dewormed and on flea/parasite control is an important part of keeping them healthy.

### **Lastly....**

**You're not alone!** The shelter has fabulous staff and volunteers who are very knowledgeable about barn/garden cat integration and care. Don't hesitate to contact us at any time throughout the integration process or beyond!

**Thank you for helping us save lives!**