



Tree House Humane Society

Winterization and Warming Tips for Outdoor Community Cats

Cats are amazingly resilient creatures. They grow a thick coat of fur, which helps them to endure the coldest months much better than we humans. Shelter from wind and precipitation is critical in preventing frostbitten ears during prolonged frigid spells. Please refer to *"Feral Cat Shelters"* for additional information on building or buying shelters for your cats.

In addition to providing shelters from the elements, below are some items that will help keep your colony cats more comfortable during cold weather.

Preventing Water and Food from Freezing

Proper hydration is imperative for the health of all cats. Cats need water, especially when dry food is the main food provided, which is often the case in winter. Here are some ways to keep their water from freezing outdoors.



The ideal solution is an electrically heated water bowl. Please note that water evaporates quickly in the dry, winter air. Heated water bowls can also be used for wet food, although the food can dry out quickly. Mixing canned food with water is a great way to get both moisture and nutrients into cats.

A double bowl is very handy, so you can offer both water and canned food together. You can also place a small bowl of canned food into a large heated water bowl. The surrounding water will keep the canned food from freezing.

If you do not have access to an electrical outlet, use a thick plastic, thermal-type of water dish. Wider and deeper is better than narrow and shallow. If the cats come to eat right away while you are there, put a little extra water in their wet or dry food.



You can also place a water bowl inside a large Styrofoam cooler. Cut a hole for the cats to enter on one end of the cooler and put the bowl at the other end. The Styrofoam's insulation will slow down the freezing process. Or use a small Styrofoam cooler, cut a hole in the top, line the inside with a plastic bag, and fill it with water.



A solar-powered water bowl is an option for sunny days in winter. The Solar Sipper (Model no. 10011) uses solar energy to keep water from freezing. It functions at 18 degrees Fahrenheit and above.

Adding a Heat Source

Generally cats will be just fine with an insulated shelter, but adding a heat source if possible is always a great option.

Heating pads can fit inside shelters or be placed separately in sheltered, dry locations. K&H Pet Products manufactures quality heating pads for cats. Make sure you purchase heating pads intended for outdoor use.



Seedling heat pads created to generate warmth for seedlings and promote growth year round are also a great way to keep wet food from freezing or provide a warm mat to sleep on.

The SnuggleSafe Disc is about the size of a Frisbee. Under normal indoor conditions, you can place the disc in the microwave for 5 min. and it will stay warm for 10-12 hrs. For outdoor use, colony caretakers report that you can microwave the disc up to 8 mins. It is possible that overheating can cause the disc to melt, so please read instructions carefully, and use some trial and error. The discs are just the right size to fit under a large dinner plate or bowl. It's convenient to have two sets of discs: you can heat and bring one set to the colony, and pick up a second set from the last time you were feeding. Snuggle Safe is also great for providing warmth inside their shelters.



Other Products to Help Keep Outdoor Cats Warm

The Mysterious PurrPad By Fleximat is an amazing non-electric thermal pad that also reflects back body heat. Cats love the rough, steel wool-like texture. PurrPads need to be in a dry place, so they are not suitable for use with storage bin shelters unless they are protected by another structure (porch, basement, crawl space, garage, shed, etc.)

Mylar emergency blankets are a silver lightweight material that reflects heat back on the cat's body. The Thermo Cube temperature controlled outlet by Farm Innovators turns on and off at desired temperatures.

