

Community Cats: Winter Weather Guide

When caring for community cats, it's important to keep them in mind when winter weather approaches. However, it's also important to remember that community cats are extremely resourceful. Their home is the outdoors, and they are adept at living in a variety of locations, weather conditions, and climates. They are well adapted to their environments and know how to find food and shelter from the elements.

Nevertheless, offering a little extra support can be helpful—especially in unseasonably cold weather. Follow these tips and tricks to help out our furry friends this winter.

1. PROVIDE EXTRA FOOD AND WATER TO HELP CATS STAY WARM

Like many other species, cats can benefit from extra food during winter. Increase their portions to help them conserve energy. Canned or wet food takes the least amount of energy to digest, meaning more energy can be spent fighting the cold. Provide fresh food and water up to twice daily rather than letting leftovers freeze.

Prevent food and water from freezing using these methods:

- Serve wet food in plastic containers
- Warm up wet food and water prior to serving
- Use bowls that are deep rather than wide and place them in sunny spots
- Spray insulation foam into the underside of plastic feeding dishes and water bowls
- Place a microwaveable heating pad under the bowls - you can make your own with rice and a sock!
- If there is a water source such as a spigot, run the water slightly so it will not freeze as quickly

2. PREPARE AHEAD OF TIME

If you know winter weather is approaching, it's wise to go ahead and stock up on both wet and dry food to provide. HSSW can help by providing food to those in need. Contact receiving@southwesthumane.org for more information about our CHOW program.

3. USE PRECAUTIONS

Be sure to check your car before driving! Animals, including cats and kittens, sometimes climb underneath hoods or inside engines to seek warmth. Also check between tires and tire wells.

Do not use antifreeze, salt, or chemicals in an area easily accessible to cats. These substances are harmful and even deadly when licked off paws or fur. Pet-friendly deicers are available at most pet stores, or you could consider setting down sand or gravel for traction instead.

4. BUILD A SHELTER

These do not have to be expensive! Shelters can be made from many other items like unwanted plastic coolers, wood structures, and even by adding insulation to common household totes. A simple styrofoam cooler, about 2" thick, makes a quick and easy shelter. Cut a hole large enough for the cat to get in and out (but not so large that predators can easily go in) and fill with straw or hay bedding to provide warmth. You can sometimes find these coolers for no cost at restaurants and medical offices, where they're used to ship perishable food and supplies and are often thrown away—simply ask if they'll stockpile to give away to community cat care takers!

Keep these shelters away from predators. If unleashed dogs are in the area, place your shelter behind a fence where the dogs can't get in, or have the entrance facing a wall so that only cats may get in and out. Be sure it's weighted down and hard to move!

Raising the shelter off the cold ground also makes it easier to warm the inside with their body heat. To keep it even warmer, you may place straw underneath. Raising the shelter and cutting the doorway several inches from the bottom also helps to keep weather out.

ADDITIONAL LINKS

Thank you for all you do for our wonderful community of free-roaming cats. For further information on this topic, please visit the following:

alleycat.org/help-outdoor-cats-in-winter-top-10-tips

alleycat.org/community-cat-care/winter-weather-tips

aspcapro.org/resource/top-ten-tips-caring-feral-cats-winter