

BUILD AN INEXPENSIVE CAT SHELTER

Alley Cat Allies strongly recommends that feral cat colonies have proper protection from inclement weather. Following are detailed instructions needed to build a feral cat shelter. These building plans are recommended for use throughout the United States. For extremely harsh, cold, and wet climates insulation (as described) is advised. Other types of shelters, such as dog igloos, can be used in less harsh climates. It is necessary for the health of feral cats to have a dry, warm refuge.

The following instructions are for building an insulated cat shelter 2 ft. x 3 ft. x 18 in. high. You should be able to buy the materials at a local lumberyard. An electric saw and screwdriver is highly recommended. Caution: If you are not experienced with an electric saw, ask a skilled person to cut the wood and paneling.

If these instructions appear to be too difficult, you may want to consider buying an already constructed dog-house (such as a dog igloo) or consult your local newspaper or community bulletin boards for someone looking for a project.

Materials Needed

- One 4-ft. x 1/2-in x 8-ft. sheet of exterior grade plywood or waferboard
- One 4-ft. x 8-ft. sheet interior paneling or thin plywood
- One package roofing shingles or enough to cover 8-sq. ft. roof
- Two 2-in. x 3-in. x 6-ft. untreated lumber
- Linoleum or other floor tiles (to cover 6-sq. ft. floor)
- One quart exterior house paint
- Two medium hinges ("T" or gate hinges)
- Two in. flat head wood screws or grippers (approximately 50)

- Four to nine bricks for foundation
- Small roofing nails (approximately 15)
- Fiberglass insulation (1 roll, or enough to cover 14-20 sq. ft.)

Tools Needed (available at local hardware store or tool rental):

- Hammer
- Saw
- Electric screw driver
- Angle brace or T-square
- Staple gun
- Measuring tape
- Marking pen

Following is a list of things to consider before starting your project. These will help you determine what you need to buy and how much work will be involved, and also provide a few helpful hints.

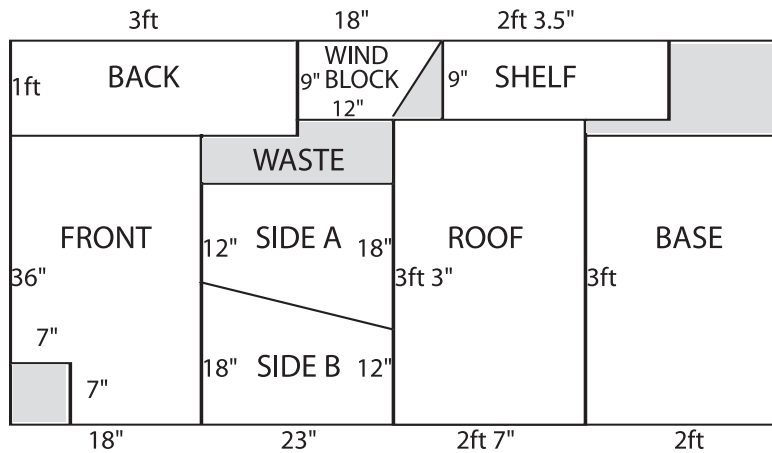
- How many cats do you need to house? This number determines how many shelters to build. Keep in mind that not all cats are likely to use the shelter, or at least not all at the same time. This shelter should probably house no more than five to seven cats at once. You can adjust this plan to make a larger shelter, or build more than one shelter as needed.
- Be sure to make the shelter small enough for transport in your vehicle. The shelter size described here will fit in a standard size car trunk with the trunk lid open.
- If you live in a climate that gets very cold, we recommend that you use insulation as described in the plans.

- Use only exterior paint to reduce weather exposure, preferably dark green or dark brown to match natural surroundings.
- Floor should be have linoleum or tile square instead of carpet to reduce the chance of flea infestation. Carpets and towels retain moisture and should not be used.
- Use screws, not nails, for better durability.
- Roof should be hinged so bedding can be replaced, and for easy access when retrieving kittens who may be in the shelter.
- Roof must be slanted to drain off water.
- A wind block should be set in place inside the door of the shelter to improve warmth. You may also consider a canvas flap to go over the door.
- Place wood chips, straw, or hay inside for warmth and comfort.
- Blankets, towels and carpets retain moisture.

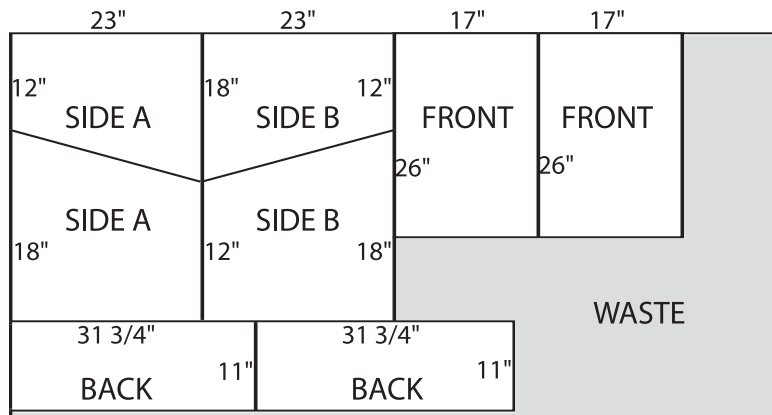
ASSEMBLY

1. Cut wood. For easy assembly cut all wood first, then assemble shelter. Some pieces may need adjustment after cutting.

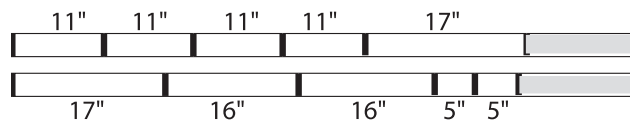
Cut plywood as shown at right. This is only enough for one shelter.



Cut paneling as shown at right. One sheet of paneling is enough for two shelters.



Cut 2-in. x 3-in. x 6-ft. lumber into 8 posts and 2 shelf braces as shown at right.



2. Place base on table or workbench. These plans referenced to front oriented at top in diagram. Put side wall A in place on left and screw front wall and left side wall together using one 17-in. corner post.
3. Position side wall B on right and attach to front wall using other 17- in. corner post.
4. Position back wall and attach to both side walls using two 11-in. corner posts.

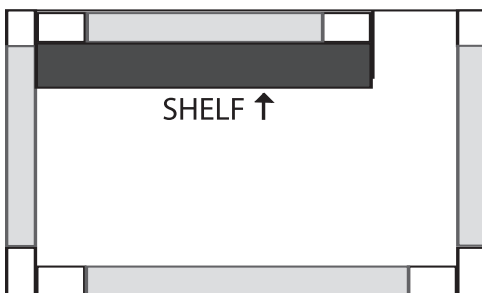
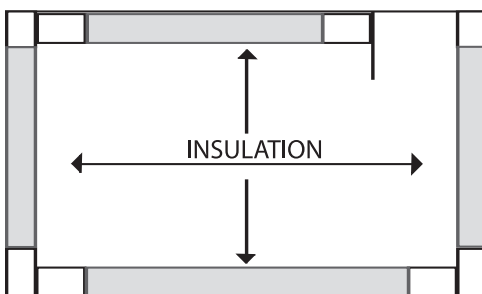
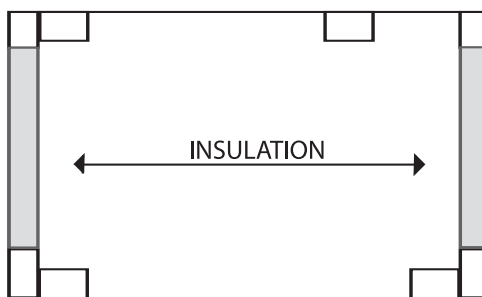
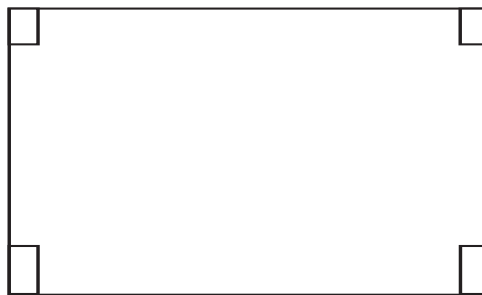
Note: corner posts should rest on top of base, as should front, back and side walls. All posts should be inside front, back, and side walls.

5. Turn walls upside down and place base on top. Mount base to sides, first screwing down corners then going along edges. Be careful that screws go straight into plywood walls, without protruding through sides.
6. Turn shelter back to upright position.

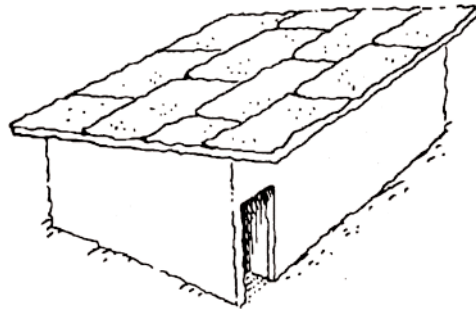
7. Cut and staple insulation blueboard to inside of side walls A and B.
8. Attach front and back posts for front and back wall supports. Note that the posts are placed flat against front and back walls, at right angles to corner posts, as shown. The post next to front door should be 5-1/2 inches from right interior wall to leave room for wind block.

9. Cut and staple insulation to inside of front and back walls.
10. Put wind block in place and screw it to front of shelter, then to bottom (do this from outside in).
11. Screw 5-in. shelf braces upright to center of wind block and left interior wall near front corner of shelter to support shelf if desired. Then screw 9-in. x 2-ft. 3.5-in. shelf on top of braces (for extra cat sleeping room).

12. Place roof on bench and turn shelter upside down. Center shelter on roof with roof hanging over on all sides. Screw hinges to underside of roof and outside front of shelter so it will open easily and stand up straight on its own.
13. Turn shelter back over and attach shingles with roofing nails in offset pattern to seal against weather. After nailing shingles bend nail points over to avoid injuring cats.



14. Place vinyl floor tiles inside if desired for extra protection.
15. Paint shelter (all exposed wood should be painted, including bottom, to protect it from rain and/or snow).
16. When installing shelter make sure to set it on top of bricks or other objects to keep it away from ground contact. Also take prevailing winds and exposure into account; placing shelter front facing south often maximizes warmth.



Note: you may also cover interior underside of roof with fiberglass or plastic foam insulation, but be sure to cover it with plastic or wood. Foam needs cover to hold it in place, and uncovered fiberglass will harm cats.

If you are not able to build this type of shelter, any type of strong box or crate can be used. You can insulate the shelter with strong plastic to keep out wind, rain, and cold. Leave a small opening for the cats to enter. A flap can be placed over the entrance for added protection. Keep off the ground by placing the shelter up on bricks. In one survey, shelter for feral cats was found to be more important than food.

Although cats can become hypothermic during cold weather and can freeze to death or suffer from frostbite, if provided with a warm, dry shelter they can survive very well. Feral cats develop thick winter coats during the fall.

Alley Cat Allies promotes nonlethal control and care for feral colonies. Stabilizing colonies through

sterilization programs is an effective and compassionate solution, and is preferable to repeated attempts to remove feral colonies by eradication. Vacated territories are usually filled by other strays moving in to repopulate the area. Neutering cats stops many problems associated with alley cats, such as spraying toms and yowling females in heat. Over 50 percent of feral kittens get sick from treatable diseases and die, causing much unnecessary suffering to the kittens as well as a distressing sight for neighbors.

Managed, sterilized colonies are healthier and are easier to deal with. This program is only for hardy and healthy feral cat colonies, not domesticated strays for whom homes should be found. We advocate daily feeding and shelter construction for each colony, which results in healthier cats and also reduces their tendencies to roam across busy streets to seek shelter and warmth possibly under automobile hoods. Many people enjoy taking care of feral colonies, providing long-term, loving care for their charges.

Shelter design and construction drawings by Bill McFadden and Ken Crawford.
Shelter illustration by Doug Hall.