

Care of Barn Cats

Our topics for this week are:

- **Benefits of a Barn Cat**
- **Adjustment Period for a New Barn Cat**
- **Routine care of a Barn Cat**

Why Have a Barn Cat

Cats have been protecting human's grain storage and dwellings from rodents, birds, and small reptiles for at least 9,500 years. Their domestication occurred in the last 3,500 years. European sailors knew the value of rodent control cats on ships and as a result, the domestic cat was spread all over the world. They are still valuable today to keep vermin out of barns. However, if barn cats do not receive proper care, they cannot do their job effectively and they may become a problem in themselves.

Selection of Barn Cats

Barn cats should be socialized and gentle so that they can easily be caught to receive preventive health care, treatment for illnesses, and be spayed or neutered. Females are better hunters and less likely to stray from their barn home than males. It is best to have more than one cat in a barn and there is generally less rivalry between females. However, males may be more aggressive against wildlife entering barns.

Basic Care

It is very important for barn cats to be vaccinated against rabies. Rabies occurs in cats in the U.S. more than any other domestic species. Cats should also receive core vaccinations against feline herpesvirus 1 (FHV1), feline calicivirus (FCV), feline panleukopenia virus (FPV), and feline leukemia virus (FeLV).

Deworming should be performed on a regular basis, particularly against tapeworms since one type is transmitted by fleas and another type by rodents. Tapeworms are not controlled by many dewormers which are designed for roundworms and hookworms.

Barn cats should be spayed or neutered as soon as practically possible. Although declawed cats can climb and hunt very well, claws are important for self-defense so barn cats should retain their claws for self-defense and facilitated climbing. All cats should be photographed and microchipped for ID in case they stray.

No collars should be worn by barn cats due to the risk of it being caught and the cat strangulating or dying of thirst from inaccessibility to water.

Introduction to Barn Environment and Animals, Especially Dogs

Unless a cat is born and raised in the barn it will live in, it has to be gradually introduced to other barn members and encouraged to think of the barn as their safe haven. Introduction of a new cat to a barn is best done in winter when it will be less inclined to explore beyond the confines of the barn.

A new cat should be kept in a large crate that accommodates a litter box. The crate should be placed in a high traffic area of the barn. The crate should be behind a gate in an empty stall or some other area inaccessible to large animals but allows the cat's view of them. All feeding should be done in the crate. When the cat no longer seems nervous about the new surroundings and other barn members, the crate door can be left open during the day. This may take about 2 weeks. No food should be left in the crate while the door is open to prevent attracting feral cats or wildlife. The cat should be closed in the crate with food at night. Once the cat is adjusted to other barn members and considers its crate a safe bed, the crate should be moved to a climate controlled room that is relatively rodent-proof, such as a tack room.

During the day, the barn cat(s) should be free to roam the barn and its surroundings. Providing a small shelf in the barn as a perch for the cat can aid in it feeling safe during the day while it adjusts to freedom. However, in the evening, they should be fed cat food in their overnight safe room. A clean source of water should be provided in the safe room and also in the barn outside the safe room. In winter, water bowls should be heated if not in heated rooms. If the safe room is heated in the winter only a litterbox and a pet bed is needed for each cat. If the safe room is not heated, an "apartment" should be made by cutting a cat-sized entrance in an opaque plastic tub with a lid. A pressure activated heating pad can be placed in the cat tub apartment.

Avoid Barn Hazards

No rodenticides should be used on the premises. Cats may ingest the poison directly or the cat may eat poisoned rodents and suffer secondary poisoning. Nearly all fly sprays, including dog and horse fly sprays, contain pyrethrins which are toxic to cats. All medications, sprays, and dusts for other species need to be inaccessible to cats. If you add your own antifreeze to vehicles, the antifreeze must be stored away from cats and any radiator fluid spills thoroughly cleaned up. If ingested, very small amounts of antifreeze are lethal to cats.

Due to fire hazard, vehicles should not be kept in barns. However, anytime a cat is outdoors and vehicles are anywhere on the premises, the hood of the vehicle should be banged on during cold weather, or the horn beeped, before starting the motor since cats like to rest on engine blocks for warmth.

If you have comments or you're interested in particular animal handling subjects contact us at CBC@BetterAnimalHandling.com

Now let's recap the key points to remember from today's episode:

- 1. Cats are an environmental friendly means of rodent control.**
- 2. Barn cats deserve good care and must have the social behavior that permits giving good care.**
- 3. Introduction of a new cat to a barn environment requires a gradual stepwise plan for the cat to develop a feeling of the barn being a safe haven.**

More information on animal handling can be found in my book, *Animal Handling and Physical Restraint*, published by CRC Press and available on Amazon and from many other fine book supply sources. My new spiral-bound handbook, *Concise Textbook of Small Animal Handling* was recently published and available from all major science book supply sources.

Additional information is provided at: www.betteranimalhandling.com . This website has more than 150 past podcasts with notes on handling of dogs, cats, other small mammals, birds, reptiles, horses, cattle, small ruminants, swine, and poultry.

Don't forget, serious injury or death can result from handling and restraining some animals. Safe and effective handling and restraint requires experience and continual practice. Acquisition of the needed skills should be under the supervision of an experienced animal handler.