Solar heating

What a stroke of genius! Debbie Peterson of the Chicagoland Stray Cat Coalition uses solar pool covers/blanks to keep her ferals warm during winter. Solar pool covers are used to attract and retain heat from the sun, to keep water in swimming pools warm. Debbie saw them as a way to upgrade her feral cat houses to solar energy! On a 10°F/-12°C night the temperature inside could easily reach 70°F/21°C! Torn but usable solar pool covers can be found curbside on suburban garbage pick-up days. Purchased new, prices vary based on construction and thickness. A 15 mil premium-grade 12' round blanket costs $32. Cut them with standard household scissors. Drape one over your feral cat house silver-side down, and the purring will start. Aim for full exposure to the south. Check the temperature until you know how much heat is generated; it may become too warm inside on milder days! Consider setting up a solar feeding station a distance from the sleeping area. FAQs

Fast & Functional

This innovative idea, costing around $30 came to us from a feral cat caregiver in Villa Park, IL.

- In previous years, we learned that finding one plastic bin to fit inside another was the most challenging part of this project. Charlie H. wrote to us with the answer: he found all the materials at Lowe's:
  - The inner box is an 18 gallon Rubbermaid "Roughneck Tote" - Lowe's part number: 44894 - Cost $5
  - The outer box is a 35 gallon Rubbermaid "Latching Tote" that is harder to find - Lowe's part number: 212261 - Cost $15
  - 1" polystyrene - Cost $10
  - Total Cost in 2007-2008: $30

Consider surrounding your cats' shelter with bails of straw. Did you know that straw is a fabulously efficient insulator? Homes insulated with 18" wide bails of straw could save 75% on heating & cooling costs. Just think what that could do for your cats!

Place shelters where they will be protected from wind and snow drifts -- particularly those without protective flaps over the door(s) -- otherwise
snow could blow in and bury/trap the cats. If there are fixed objects, such as buildings in your feral cat shelter area, pay attention to the way the winds tend to circulate, and place the shelters where there is the least amount of blowing & drifting snow. This could be a lifesaver, particularly for those who endure extreme winter weather, in which roads may be impassable for 1-2 days.

Depending on predators and other animals/hazards in your area, some cats may not use shelters unless there are two exits -- one for them to sneak out should another unwanted animal enter. Consider an emergency exit with a flap that opens from the inside only.

"Cat"illac Ranch

Following the instructions from Alley Cat Allies, Diane & Manfred of Glen Ellyn, IL constructed the this Cadillac of feral cat shelters, complete with a tile floor and stuffed with straw in the winter.
"Deluxe Kitty Cottage"
Submitted by: **Stan Newcombe** of Michigan

Well, if this isn't the Cat's Meow, we don't know what is! This dandy cottage that Stan Newcombe and his family & friends built for their feral colony has a heat source that can handle Michigan's winters and accommodates 8-10 cats.

- Dimensions: 2 feet deep, 4 feet long, 2 - 2 1/2 feet tall.
- Has a carpeted loft that cats jump up into once inside.
- Insulated walls.
- Flea-deterrent cedar on walls and under carpeting; and a few drops of eucalyptus oil in the corners every few months helps keep fleas at bay.
- Roof lifts up and loft lifts out for easy cleaning.
- A 40-Watt porch lamp inside the shelter helps keep cats warm. Stan painted the globe black (the glass casing covering the light bulb), so the brightness of the light does not blind or offend the cats inside.
- Small window in front lets in natural light, and allows caregiver to see when bulb has burned out.
- Temperature was 0° F/-17°C outside with a wind chill of -15°F/-26°C, it was 40°F/4°C inside by the door.

Most of the wood and materials were scrap and/or donated by friends.