

Building A Cooler Shelter

Supplies

- Cooler- interior dimensions should be a minimum of 15"X15"X15"- or some combination thereof like 18"X15"X12"- but no dimension should be less than 12". If you have two smaller coolers, whose openings are the same size and shape you can throw away the lids and marry the bottoms together to create a bigger interior space. Thicker coolers (1.5"-2.5")- like those used for Omaha Steaks or by hospitals work best.
- Duct Tape
- Scissors
- Sharpie or other felt tip pen
- Template for door opening- a large juice can or small salad plate will work. The opening should be 6"-6.6" in diameter.
- Insulating bubble wrap or other insulated material for door covering
- Serrated blade such as a steak knife or keyhole saw
- Marsh hay or straw (Available for \$7 per bale at Jung's both winter and summer)

Start by cutting the opening. (Figure 1)

- Take the lid off the cooler and set it aside.
- Make the opening on one of the shorter sides of the cooler.
- The bottom of the opening should start no lower than 2.5"-3" from the bottom of the cooler.
- Trace around your template, cut out the opening with your serrated blade.
- Make certain that the opening isn't narrower on the inside of the shelter than on the outside- it's sometimes hard to cut the thicker coolers evenly on the first try.



Figure 1

Create your door covering.

- Cut a piece of the insulating material 2" wider than the door opening and just slightly longer than the bottom of the door opening.
- If you're using the bubble wrap, make sure that the row of bubble runs vertically- up the height of the cooler rather than across the width. (Figure 2)

Figure 2



- Tape the top of the material to the outside rim of the cooler. (Figure 2) The duct tape attaching the material to the front of the cooler will be trapped between the rim of the cooler and the lid when the lid is on. (Figure 3)

Figure 3



- Take your scissors and cut the material covering the opening into vertical strips about $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide. (See Figure 2 again)
- The strips should end right above the door opening rather than being cut up to the top of the cooler.
- Repeat **Create your door covering** steps above, this time using a piece of material slightly wider and longer than the first. (Figure 3)



- After cutting the second door layer into strips tape the sides of the covering to the cooler.
- At this point, the material should cover the opening and be attached at the top and on both sides- the bottom **should be even with the bottom of the door opening** and loose. (Figure 4)

Figure 4



- The material covering the opening should now resemble the strips inside a car wash. This will allow the cat to go in and out but still provide some cover so that snow doesn't blow into the shelter. (Figure 6)
- Place a strip of tape across the top of the cut edges to prevent tearing. (Figure 6)

Figure 6



- Cut another strip of insulating material about 1.5" wide and 2" longer than the door opening strips.
- Affix that above the door opening so that the door strips can be tucked up into it. (Figure 7 and Figure 7A)



Figure 7



Figure 7A

- Lift the strips up and tape the sides where the solid fabric frames the door opening. Run additional strips of tape horizontally along the bottom of the opening to cover any raw ends of tape or insulating material. This will also help keep the Styrofoam from crumbling around the shelter opening. (Figure 8)
- No raw edges of insulating material should be showing. They should all be covered with tape. (Figure 8)

Figure 8



Capping and sealing

- Put the lid back on the cooler
- Tape the lid on securely. Run several layers of tape (overlapping one another slightly) around the cooler horizontally where the lid and the body meet. (Figure 9)



Figure 9



Figure 10

- Run tape around the cooler vertically at the front and back of the cooler as well. (Figure 10)



Figure 11

- Be generous- duct tape is cheap. All raw ends of tape should be covered or stuck to the tape running horizontally or vertically around the shelter. Duct tape will stick to itself all winter no matter how wet or cold. It's less likely to stick to Styrofoam. (Figure 11)

Stuffing the shelter

- Always stuff the shelter with hay or straw. Don't use newspapers or textiles of any sort- they wick moisture. The hay stays dry, any debris sifts to the bottom and the air pockets between the straws hold body heat.
- Be generous! Hay is cheap and it packs down.
- Stuff the shelter in such a way that there is straw not just on the bottom of the cooler, but up the sides and along the inside of the lid. Just leave or create a pocket for the cat to crawl into.
- I like to crush and sprinkle loose, dry catnip into the straw. It helps attract the cat and may prompt them to climb into the shelter the first time.
- When you deploy the shelter leave three or four sets of the door strips caught up in the strap above. This will encourage the cat to look inside and enter the shelter for the first time. (Figure 12)



Figure 12

Notes

- If the cooler is significantly wider at the top than at the bottom turn it upside down to give the cat more floor space and improve stability. In that case, the cooler top becomes the shelter bottom and your tape ends will be trapped between the cooler bottom and the rim. (Figures 12-15)

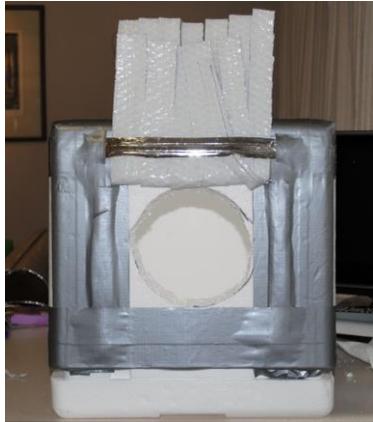


Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15

- When deploying these shelters suggest that the user put them up on a couple of bricks, or blocks of some sort to keep them up a bit above the snow. It doesn't hurt to put another brick or heavy object on top- being made of Styrofoam they are fairly light and may shift in high winds.
- Cats prefer the shelters to be in a slightly protected spot- up against a building or under a bush- rather than out in the middle of a yard or field.
- Once you see that the cat has started using the shelter release the door strips from the strap. (rather than looking like Figure 12 it will then look like Figure 11)

For any questions or help with problems contact-

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