

Cagin Coon
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by Todd Dunlap

I have trapped for 28 years and I haven't missed a season since the age of 12. The very first animal that I ever caught was a raccoon, and I have been catching them ever since. I am by no means an expert or professional, but over the years I have learned to use cages with rarely a miss or refusal. I will tell you about my techniques and you can try them for yourself.

The first thing is the cage itself. I use three different sizes for raccoon. The one that I probably use 80% of the time is my 10" x 12" x 32". This will catch almost any raccoon that we have in Ohio. The other two cage sizes are 12" x 12" x 36" and 8" x 8" x 24". When I set up on a family of raccoon in spring or early summer, I use the large trap, along with a couple of smaller ones close by. By using the larger one I can make multiple catches at once. If the mother raccoon is caught in the big one, the young ones will stay close by her and will most likely be caught in the smaller cages. For general use I stick with the 10" x 12" x 32" most of the time. All of my cages are painted either flat black, flat green, or flat brown. You can catch raccoon in the shiny silver one, but I do a lot of nuisance work and the shiny traps are just too visible to humans. At \$35 to \$55 apiece I don't want them stolen.

Brand new cages will work, but I modify everyone that I buy. First, they must have a carrying handle. Larger traps come with one, if not I make one out of heavy gauge wire. I also install a hand guard around the handle. This will keep the raccoon from reaching up and scratching your hand while you are carrying it to the truck. Next, I install bait boxes on the inside. They are approximately 3" square. I make them out of hardware cloth, with four sides and a bottom. They are placed all the way to the rear of the cage and about halfway between the top and bottom. I wire them solid to the back of the cage. The reason for the bait box is to keep the bait off of the ground. When trapping in the heat of the summer, in a couple of hours ants will consume any bait placed on the bottom of the cage. Plus by keeping it up, it is more visible and the scent will disperse better. Once the bait boxes are mounted in place, I cut one of the cross wires off directly above the box in the top and one in the rear right of the box. This makes roughly a 1" x 2' slat for placement of bait from either the rear or the top. Trap tags with my name and address is placed in the upper right hand corner. I place them the same way every time. So I can tell when one breaks off without having to look all over for it. Now that the cage trap is modified, let's talk about setting it.

When looking for a place to set your trap, always remember that once a raccoon is caught, anything that it can reach will be pulled inside the trap. Always set on raccoon sign. If it was there once, it will be back. Whether it's a trashcan, barn, or trail, it will be visited again. Don't try to make it come to the trap, place the trap where the raccoon is going to go anyway. Cage traps are very versatile and can be set almost anywhere. If you only learn one thing from this article I hope it is this: the cage must be set so that it is stable. This means that it will not rock or wobble in any way. It is just like a fox or coyote set. First, set the cage down and grab it by the front with one hand and the back with the other. Now slide it back and forth a few times, putting downward pressure on it. This does two things. One, it takes out any humps in the ground and creates a level surface. Two, it forces the ground duff up through the wire on the floor. You can catch some raccoon with bare wire exposed on the bottom, but you will get a lot less refusals if the wire is covered up. Some raccoon will not walk on the wire. If you're in the woods use leaves, if you're in a barn use straw or dirt from the floor. Just make it the same as what is outside of the cage. Use whatever is at the site. Smooth it out with your hand and make it as natural as possible. Make sure the treadle or pan will drop freely when the raccoon steps on it. Once that is done I stake the trap on the sides with rerod stakes; the same I use for fox. If the trap is against a wall I just use stakes on the side away from the wall. If it is not against anything, I will put stakes on two sides and one in the back. If it wobbles, place sticks underneath so that it is rock solid. If necessary, place something heavy on top, such as a rock or a brick.

Now I bait the cage trap. Depending on where the set is and what time of year it is makes a difference as to what bait to use. If I am around cats I use nothing but sweet smelling baits such as marshmallows and a sweet lure. If cats are not a problem, sardines in oil are hard to beat. For lure placement I use a "y" shaped stick about 4" long at the bottom and just an inch or two on the up rights. Dip the stick in the lure bottle and stick it down through the top of the cage, right above the bait box. Some lure will drip off onto the bait, but most will stay on the stick. This keeps your lure off the ground allowing any slight breeze to disperse the scent around the area. If no cats are in the area, I place a trail of fish oil leading right into the trap. I open the door, set the trap and wait until the next day; a raccoon will be there.

There you have it, my method of using cage traps. Another tool, which can be used to catch raccoon. The cage trap will never replace foothold traps, but they can be used where footholds can't. I hope there is a technique in my article that you can use on your trap line. Good Luck! ### Todd M. Dunlap, 2750 Wayne Ridge Rd., Zanesville, OH 43701