

**Raccoon Trapping for Beginners**  
**Article from Sep - Oct 2005 Buckeye Trapper**  
**by Mike Conrad**

It is fairly simple to trap a raccoon. However, using selected traps at specific locations, to ensure that the raccoon you caught is waiting for you when you check your traps, is a little more difficult.

There are many aspects to raccoon trapping. You need traps to capture the animal, sets to use in capturing and holding a raccoon, and other equipment needed for trapping and handling your catch. This article will deal mainly with the trapping aspect.

Before we get started though, I would like to briefly mention some basic equipment that you will need for any type of trapping; 14 gauge wire, wire cutting pliers, small axe or hatchet, bait, lure, trapping basket or 5 gallon bucket, trap stakes, knee or hip boots, etc. You will also need two of the most important pieces of trapping equipment, time and dedication. Raccoon trapping requires the time necessary to meet your catch goals and the dedication to check your traps each and every day, regardless of anything else.

As far as handling your furs, you can skin and stretch them yourself; you can freeze them whole, or you can freeze the hides after you have skinned them. If you need help handling your pelts you can ask local trappers who should be willing to offer advice. You can also visit a local fur dealer if one is nearby.

Another excellent option, to learn about handling pelts and about trapping, is available by attending either the OSTA Fall Convention (Held in Circleville this year.) or any of the OSTA Region Meets. You can also learn a lot just by going to any of the Fur Auctions. Look around and ask a few questions, you will be surprised how much you can learn.

Now – let's get started on the basics. Raccoons are fairly easy to trap. They respond readily to baits and lures, which can either be store bought (peanut butter and/or marshmallows, etc.) or purchased commercially from lure manufacturers. They can also be trapped, without bait, simply by setting a trap in a raccoon trail or in an area where raccoons frequently visit. Look for raccoon tracks in wet areas on trails or for their droppings to indicate that they are using a specific trail. Areas where raccoons frequently visit include any tile or small body of water that empties into a pond, ditch or creek. They are found near likely den sites such as mature woods, barns, abandoned buildings, and ground hog holes. They are also found near food sources like corn fields, bird feeders, fruit orchards, nut trees and along any stream that contains small fish, crawdads and other aquatic life.

There are many types of traps that can be used for trapping raccoons. They include box traps, foothold traps, specialty traps, snares and bodygripping traps. Snares and bodygripping traps have their place on any trap line; however, they are a little more difficult for beginners to use, and I will skip over their use in this article.

Probably the easiest trap to set and one of the best at holding a raccoon is the box trap, especially for youngsters. While these traps are bulky and expensive, they have their place on just about any trap line, large or small. These traps last practically forever with little or no maintenance and can be set anywhere raccoons visit. You will have a better chance of making a catch if you make sure that the box trap is set in such a way so that it will not move when an animal steps on any part of the trap. Use bait and lure that offers site as well as odor to attract your target animal.

Box traps offer three distinct advantages over any other type of trap. First, since the animal is restrained by being enclosed inside the trap, they can be set anywhere there is room, regardless of the vegetation or debris near your set. (More on this important detail later.) Second, they can be used where the possibility of capturing a pet or unwanted animal is likely. The use of box traps will open up trapping areas where you normally would

not be able to trap. Landowners with pets will give trapping permission much more readily if you tell them that you will be using box traps. They also work well on concrete or asphalt, set next to a trash dumpster; a location where other traps can not be set. Third, they can be set by even the youngest trappers who are able to carry them or have someone help them to carry them, with little difficulty.

The advantages of using box traps far outweigh the disadvantages. While their bulk and cost prohibit purchasing and using large numbers of these traps, any trapper would be well served to have at least a few available. The fact that they can be used indefinitely, with little or no maintenance, makes their high purchase price affordable over their many years of use.

There are many foothold traps available for trapping raccoons. The types of traps that I would recommend for younger trappers include the #1-1/2 coilspring, the #1 coilspring and the #11 double longspring. With practice, most youths old enough to trap should be able to set these traps without too much difficulty. Any of these traps will work well with drowning sets. The #1 and #11 are better suited for dryland sets.

Foothold traps are relatively inexpensive and with proper care will last for many years. The one disadvantage with using them is that they must be set properly to prevent a raccoon from escaping. A raccoon has tapered paws and is very strong, which makes it easy for them to “power out” of a trap, when given the chance. To prevent this, foothold traps must be set in such a way that a caught raccoon can not reach any saplings thicker than your little finger, or reach any debris; such as tree roots, heavy trash or anything that is heavy and/or immovable. If a raccoon can reach any of these objects it is fairly easy for them to grab a hold of these object and pull themselves out of the trap. Attaching your footholds to stakes, out of reach of these objects, is recommended. While some trappers like to attach their traps to drags, there are too many variables involved that limit their use to more experienced trappers. If you encounter a location near your set where there are saplings or debris, and it is near water, you can make a drowning set.

Drowning sets work well wherever there is deep enough water, typically 18-24”, or more. Instead of staking your trap solid, it is attached to a length of 14 gauge wire. The wire is fastened to a stake driven into deep water or it is attached to a heavy weight, such as a cement block or a feed sack filled with stones and dirt. Run the wire up to your set and fasten your trap to the wire using a drowning lock or a swivel. When attached to the wire properly, the trap will slide easily into deep water, but will bind on the wire and not slide back towards the bank. The end of the wire is attached to a stake near the set. Any raccoon that is caught will slide down the wire and quickly drown.

Finally, there are specialty traps, such as dog-proof traps, egg traps, little grizz getters, etc. All of these traps work well, but are expensive and are more difficult to set. Additionally, some of these traps require special tools to be used to set them. If you are old enough to be able to set these traps, and can afford the extra costs, they do have a place on most trap lines.

Like box traps, they can be set where catching domestic animals is a problem. They can also be used in light vegetation where you can not make a drowning set but where there is too much debris for regular foothold traps. A raccoon can not pull out of these traps as easily. Another advantage for young trappers is that a parent, older relative, or adult can set these traps for you ahead of time. Then you can take them out and make your sets on the trap line. After a catch you may need help remaking your set, or you can just the trap home along with the raccoon.

Other items that help you hold onto your catch include the use of center swiveling, adding extra swivels to your chains, and properly adjusting pan tension on your traps. I did not mention any specific sets as there are many good books and trapping magazines that cover raccoon sets and the trap adjustments listed above. I have provided some information on how to hold onto your catch after it is made. For some trappers this is more difficult than catching the raccoon itself.

By using box traps, drowning sets, foothold traps away from saplings and debris, and some of the specialty traps that are available, young trappers can catch and hold on to more raccoons, increasing their catch dramatically. ### Mike Conrad, 1244 Abbe Road, Sheffield, OH 44054.

Editors Note: Mike will be giving a Jr. Demo on raccoon trapping at the Convention in Circleville. See the Convention Schedule for more details.