



Surveillance Camera Checklist

IMPORTANT! Using a surveillance camera (e.g. security, wildlife, trail or game camera) is one of the most effective methods for recovering an escaped indoor-only cat, displaced (lost away from home) outdoor-access cat or skittish lost dog. However, to be effective, you generally need to use a bait or lure and/or humane trap. If you choose to use a trap, this must be properly monitored for the safety of your pet. If you choose to start with bait only, be aware that you may attract other pets and/or wildlife that could put your pet at risk of disease, injury or death. Many lost dogs and cats are recovered safely using baited feeding stations and humane traps.

1. Selecting a Camera

You can find more information on selecting a surveillance camera [here](#).

- Regular trail camera – cheapest option but saves photos to a SD card, which must be retrieved to check photos
- Wireless security camera – requires wifi but provides live images and recordings
- Cellular camera – requires purchase of cellular plan but will email and/or text images

2. Supplies Needed

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| <input type="checkbox"/> Camera | <input type="checkbox"/> Fresh batteries |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SD Card (plus a spare) | <input type="checkbox"/> Bait or lure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cable lock, security box and/or padlock | <input type="checkbox"/> Trapping supplies (if needed) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Keys for any locks | <input type="checkbox"/> Camera user manual |

3. Preparing the Camera

- Make sure that the camera has batteries, preferably with more than 50% power.
- Set the date and time.
- If possible, set camera to rapid fire 3 photos (or more), then rest 5-10 seconds before taking more photos.
- Make sure that the camera has an SD card with plenty of empty space.
- Take some test photos to make sure that the camera is working and view the photos to confirm that the SD card is storing photos.

4. Where to Place the Camera

- For most missing pets, place the camera at the location of a potential sighting.
- For an escaped indoor-only cat, place one camera near the point of escape.
- For an escaped indoor-only cat or any cat lost away from home, place a camera near the point last seen. Also try and place this near some cover like bushes, trees, a shed, deck or open building.
- Choose a location which has an unobstructed view in front of the camera but is within 10 feet of good cover (e.g. bushes, woods, a deck or open building).
- If using the camera somewhere other than your own yard, make sure to get the property owner's permission.

5. Setting up the Camera

- For cats, place the camera 6-12" off the ground. For dogs, place at the height of the dog, but not more than 36".
- Preferably select a location where the ground is relatively flat. This reduces the chance of your pet missing the camera sensor.
- Attach the camera to a secure straight object such as a tree, railing or pole. Cinder blocks or camera stands also work well, but there is a greater chance of theft.
- To prevent theft, make sure to use a cable lock, chain and/or security box.
- If you are using a camera with any lights that glow when a photo is taken (includes regular infrared cameras), then face the camera away from where people might see it.
- If your pet is extremely skittish, you might choose to place the camera above eye-level and angle it down. This makes the infrared flash less likely to spook them. However, it can be more difficult to aim and reduces the size of the sensor area so not recommended in general.

6. Aiming and Testing the Camera

- Use a flashlight or laser pointer placed next to the camera to get an idea of where it is pointing.
- Once attached make sure the camera is pointing level with the ground and not angled up or down (unless you are placing the camera up high). If necessary, place a wedge behind the camera to make it point straight.
- Clear away any branches or brush obstructing the view of the camera.
- Set the camera to test mode and/or take a few test photos. This is often easier in the evening if you are using a red glow infrared camera. Then you can see the camera “flash.”
- Make sure that the camera is turned on (and not still in test mode) when you leave. Take a final test photo.

7. Baiting the Camera

- For cats and small dogs, place the bait and/or trap about 5-10 feet in front of the camera. For large dogs 10-20 feet is better. If farther away, your pet is less likely to notice the camera, but reliability of the camera decreases with distance and photos are harder to decipher. Some flashes will not reach past 20 feet.
- Use food that you know your pet really likes, but preferably moist or stinky food.
- If not using a trap, make sure that you are putting out enough food that it lasts all night.
- Place out some scent articles that smell like you or someone that your pet is strongly attached.

8. Checking the Camera

- Upon arriving, walk in front of the camera to take a photo. This will help verify that the camera is working and that the date and time are correct.
- Turn off the camera and remove the SD card.
- If the camera is in a remote location, then bring a laptop or cell phone adapter to make sure that the camera is working before you leave. Confirm that the date and time are still correct.
- Confirm that the batteries still have power.
- Bring something to wipe the lens if it is dirty.
- Insert a new SD card and make sure to turn the camera back on. Take another test photo before leaving.

9. Trouble Shooting

- If you are getting lots of empty photos, make sure that your camera is not facing into the rising or setting sun. The heat from the sun can trigger the motion sensor. Bushes or branches that warm up in the sun and then blow in the wind can also trigger the camera.
- If night photos are too bright and you can't see the animal, try covering some of the infrared flash with black electrical tape. Or place the bait/trap farther away.
- If photos are not being recorded at night, first check your settings. Then check your batteries. Some black flash cameras need better batteries, or they won't work at night under 50% battery power. Energizer alkaline or lithium batteries are recommended.
- If no photos are being saved to the SD card, check to make sure the small lock switch on the card is not switched to ON. Make sure that the card is not full. If still not working, reformat the SD card in the camera.
- If your camera is not working properly, try removing the batteries and replacing them.

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Visit Lost Pet Research & Recovery (LostPetResearch.com) for additional lost pet resources and professional search and recovery services.