

Choosing Your New Cat

Basic Feline Care



CARE SHEET

Developed with and approved by a Qualified Veterinarian

Think adoption First! PETCO encourages you to adopt your new cat from a shelter or another reputable animal welfare organization. Purebred cats are often available in shelters. Check with your local cat fanciers club to find the names and numbers of local cat breed rescue groups dedicated to your desired breed. Remember, when you adopt an animal, you save two lives – the life of the animal you adopted, and the life of the animal you just made room for in the shelter.

If you have decided to buy a purebred cat, do some research to find the breed that is right for you, your family, and your living arrangement. Then buy from a responsible breeder who will sell you a guaranteed healthy, carefully bred animal that will be a member of your family for many years.

Research Your Chosen Breed

All breeds are not alike. The best place to see good examples of the different cat breeds and connect with breeders is a recognized cat show. There are several purebred registries that offer shows. You can look up their schedules on the internet or in the calendar section of cat magazines. The major registries in the United States are CFA (Cat Fanciers Association) and TICA (The International Cat Association). These registries also can provide contact information for breed rescue groups.

The breeders at these shows are showing their finest specimens, and are usually happy to tell you all about their beloved cats. Always ask an exhibitor when the best time would be to talk with them. If someone is preparing to take their cat into the show ring, step aside and return when they are not so busy. Breeders often have brochures and photo albums that you can look through

Ask about your chosen breed's characteristics. Explain what you are looking for in a pet cat – lap cat, companion, show cat, etc. Does your chosen breed fit into those desires? How much grooming time does this particular breed require? How much exercise and interaction? Some breeds prefer to sit on the sidelines and coach, while others need to be the center of any activity in the house. Does this breed truly fit with your idea of the perfect pet cat?

Interviewing the Breeder

Once you've narrowed down your list to one or two chosen breeds, start interviewing breeders.

Ask the breeder lots of questions about their cats, and visit the cattery if at all possible. See the sire and dam, or at least their pictures, and look at their pedigrees. Are there show titles in your kitten's ancestry? A breeder who shows is constantly striving to improve the breed, not just to produce sellable kittens. Beware of too many mother/son or other close family crosses. Some are done purposely, but too many can indicate a problem. In some of the rarer breeds, the gene pool is smaller so more inbreeding may be done. This increases the possibility of genetic faults being passed down. Ask your breeder about it. If your concerns are not addressed, look elsewhere.

How many cats does the breeder have, and what conditions are they kept in? Look into the cages. Are they kept clean? Intact males and females have to be kept separately, so don't be surprised if some are caged. On the other hand, you want your kitten and his parents to be well socialized and used to being handled. Do the cats and kittens appear healthy and friendly? Runny noses, runny eyes, and sneezing may indicate poor health.

Ask the breeder to provide references from former buyers. Are they happy with their cat and his health? Did the breeder honor the contract and provide help when they had questions? A committed breeder wants to know how her cats are doing.

Your chosen breeder may not have kittens available right now. Get on a waiting list for the next litter. (Some breeders may require a deposit.) A responsible breeder does not have lots of kittens ready to go at all times. Their focus is quality, not quantity.

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The Guarantee Expect to be asked a lot of questions about your lifestyle and how you plan to care for your new kitten. A breeder should be very picky about the homes their kittens go to, and most will require you to sign a sales contract. You may be required to spay or neuter your cat, keep it indoors, and agree not to declaw your pet, among other requirements. There may also be a clause that requires you to return the cat if at any time in its life you can no longer keep it.

In return, you should receive the cat's registration papers, its pedigree history and a written health guarantee. You fill out and mail in the registration forms to the registry with the required fee. The breeder may hold the registration until your cat is spayed or neutered. Remember, papers do not guarantee quality. Registries register cats, but do not police the breeders.

Most guarantees require you to have your new kitten examined by a veterinarian within a few days after purchase to verify its health. One of the benefits of buying a purebred cat is you can find out its genetic health history. The breeder should be able to tell you what hereditary defects are found in this breed, and if it appears in any of your cat's ancestors. Guarantees may also cover traits specific to the breed. For example: folded ears in a Scottish Fold cat. Guarantees generally include a buy-back clause, or an offer for a replacement kitten if your chosen kitten should develop any genetic defects.

Pet or Show Quality? A breeder prepares her kittens to be show cats from birth by handling, grooming and socializing them. But not every kitten grows up to be show quality. Most faults are things the pet owner might not even notice: ears set too high, missing tooth, growing too big, etc. These faults may keep it out of the show ring, but will not keep it from being a wonderful pet. Pet quality kittens tend to be less expensive than possible show quality ones. If you want a show cat, you will probably pay more, and the breeder might want to keep breeding rights.

You don't have to have an unaltered, purebred cat to show. Most shows have classes for altered cats. Even mixed breed cats can be shown in the household pet category.

Stressed out Kittens Kittens found in shelters can become wonderful lifelong companions. Often the shelter environment can be very stressful, and a kitten's true personality may not be apparent at first glance. The additional stress of being confined and handled by many strangers can also depress their immune systems. Be sure to have your new kitty checked by a veterinarian immediately, ideally before you even take it home. Look out for runny noses or crusted eyes, uneven movement, dry fur, lack of energy or lack of appetite as these may be an indication of a health issue.