

choosing your new cat

basic feline care

We encourage you to Think Adoption First and adopt your new cat from a shelter or 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. 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 online 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 can also 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 in? How much grooming time does this



Developed with and approved by a qualified veterinarian.

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?

Finding your new companion:

Once you've narrowed down your list to one or two chosen breeds, begin looking for your new companion at shelters, rescues or online. PetFinder is a great resource and allows you to filter your results to help you find just the cat or kitten you are looking for.

Cats and kittens found in shelters can be wonderful lifelong companions. Keep in mind that often the shelter environment can be very stressful, and a cat's true personality may not be apparent at first glance. The additional stress of being confined and handled by many strangers can also suppress their immune systems, but once they are in a loving home, with good nutrition, a chance to exercise and lots of care and attention, they will begin to thrive and their personalities will shine.

Besides saving a life, one of the best things about adopting a cat or kitten from a shelter or rescue is the fact that your new feline friend will already be spayed or neutered and that cost is incorporated in the adoption fee.

Some cats and kittens live with fosters, so if you do not see the breed you are looking for, remember to ask someone who works there or visit their website to view all of the wonderful felines that are living off-site.

If you make the decision to purchase a cat or kitten, 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 habitats. Are they kept clean? Intact males and females have to be kept separately, so don't be surprised if some are confined. On the other hand, you want your kitten and their parents to be well-socialized and comfortable with 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 families who purchased a cat from them. Are they happy with their cat and their cat's health? Did the breeder honor the contract and provide help when they had questions? A committed breeder wants to know how the 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.

Regardless of where you choose to get your new cat or kitten from, look out for runny noses or crusted eyes, sneezing, uneven movement, dry fur, lack of energy or lack of appetite as these may be an indication of a health issue. Be sure to have your new cat checked by a veterinarian as soon as possible—preferably before it comes into contact with any other pets you have at home.

The details:

Whether adopting from a shelter or purchasing a cat from a breeder, expect to be asked a lot of questions about your lifestyle and how you plan to care for your new companion. Everyone's goal should be to make sure you are matched with the cat that is right for your family and that you have the time, resources and commitment to provide a forever home for this animal.

Shelters and rescues are going to want to make sure you have the entire family's approval to bring home a new family member. Additionally, they want to make sure that the pet will be safe in their new home and that you have a veterinarian that can help with all of your new pet's health needs. Most shelters ensure their pets are microchipped so that you can be reunited with your pet should they ever become lost.

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 your pet inside and agree to 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 the cat as your pet.

In return, you should receive the cat's registration papers, its pedigree history and a written health guarantee. 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 of purchase to verify its health. One of the benefits of buying a purebred cat is that 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?

Breeders prepare their 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 parent might not even notice: ears set too high, missing tooth, growing too big, etc. These "faults" may keep a cat 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 kittens. 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