



Bringing Home a Kitten

Before selecting a kitten, ask yourself if you are willing to make a commitment of time to care for the pet and provide the proper nutrition and veterinary care over the years. Choosing a kitten is making a long-term commitment to provide daily care for a living creature who will be totally dependent upon you.

Choosing a pet for you When you and your family members decide to adopt a kitten, keep in mind that the average life span for a neutered household cat is 12 to 14 years. Many cats live up to 20 years or even longer. Once you decide to make such a long-term commitment, it's time to make certain decisions before selecting a kitten.

Appearance The first decision has to do with appearance. You will be looking at the kitten you select for years to come. Do you have a color preference? Are markings important to you? Would you like a sleek, angular cat like a Siamese and the other Orientals? Do you prefer the stocky look of a British shorthair? Do you prefer a longhaired or shorthaired cat?

If you believe you would like a longhaired cat, ask yourself if you will have time to groom a longhaired cat daily for as long as the cat lives. This is necessary. To help avoid mats and tangles in the hair coat which can lead to skin irritations. A shorthaired cat requires grooming only two or three times a week.

Personality All cats have different personalities. What kind of cat do you want? Do you want a cat who is a conversationalist such as the Siamese? A cat as active and inquisitive as the Abyssinian? Or do you prefer the quiet, aristocratic demeanor of a Persian or Himalayan? To find out more about the various breeds, consult cat books at your local library, attend cat shows in your area and ask questions of the breeder.

Health Concerns Do not adopt a kitten until it is six to eight weeks of age. The kitten should be outgoing, active, curious and alert. It should not be afraid of strangers or be upset or give any evidence of hostile behavior when it is picked up. The overall health of the kitten is extremely important. It should have no discharge from the nose or eyes, a shiny coat, no skin irritations or red blotches and no bald patches. Look for clean ears, white teeth and pink gums. Check around the tail to be certain there is no evidence of diarrhea or inflammation. A pot-bellied kitten may indicate the presence of internal parasites.

Male or Female? Choosing a male or female depends on your personal preference. If you plan to enter into a responsible breeding program, keep in mind the serious problem of pet overpopulation and problems encountered with intact females and males.

Unlike the dog, which comes "in season" twice a year, a female cat is not as predictable and may experience several heat cycles over the course of one year. A female cat in heat is not a pretty sight. In addition to emitting a variety of "calls" indicating she is ready to mate, she may roll madly around the floor, engage in persistent rubbing against family members' feet and assume a peculiar position with the tail lifted and the hindquarters in the air. This kind of behavior can last up to a week.

The problem of a male cat's spraying cannot be over emphasized. The male releases urine with a strong and highly offensive odor. In addition to marking his territory, the odor is meant to attract the female. Generally, male cats do not begin to spray until they are 10 to 12 months of age. Some cats who are neutered after that age may continue to spray because they have developed the habit. Intact male cats not used for stud and kept indoors often become nervous and aggressive. The neutered male is usually gentle and even-tempered. The intact male who is allowed to go outdoors will roam in pursuit of females in heat and get into cat fights.