

FACTSHEET

Choosing the right kitten or cat

Choosing a feline companion is a big decision about a relationship (and a responsibility) that could last longer than 15 years. If you want to adopt a pet for someone else as a gift then it has to be a matter that is discussed and agreed with them – and *they* have to choose the cat.

Being a good cat owner and being a good neighbour means choosing the right kitten or cat for your home and lifestyle. A cat selected to suit their living environment is more likely to be happy and well-adjusted, and therefore less likely to exhibit unwanted behaviours. Unless you are a registered breeder, you should only adopt an already-desexed cat or kitten, or take them to the vet for desexing before you bring them home.

Consider your home: can you provide secure outdoor access for a cat or will they be indoors-only? If you rent or live in a strata complex, do you have permission to keep a cat? Do you live in a wildlife sensitive area or are there any local government restrictions on cat ownership in your area? Can you install cat-proof fencing or a secure outdoor cat enclosure? Is there enough space indoors to provide a private space for a litterbox (or more than one if you plan to have more than one cat)? Are there secure places for a cat to retreat when they don't want company? Can you provide vertical spaces in your home (eg tops of cupboards, window perches)? Are you prepared to let a cat have full access throughout your home and if not, how do you plan to limit access? How will you ensure your cat receives environmental enrichment, even if they are an indoor-only cat?

Think about your reasons for adopting a cat, and consider the issues for your household. Are you choosing a cat as a friend for yourself, for your children or for another pet? Do you plan to adopt more pets later on? What species? Are you planning to increase the size of your human family? These answers will help you decide on whether your new cat needs attributes such as boldness and self-reliance.

Does anyone in your family have allergies? Some people with allergies to cats will find that they are less or more sensitive to different breeds, or in different circumstances: they should meet a prospective pet several times and discuss allergy treatments with their GP.

It is important to choose a cat or kitten who will fit your lifestyle. How many hours are you away during the day? For someone who is away from home for long hours every day, a very active kitten or an adult cat who craves companionship are not good choices. How active is your household? For a family with noisy young children, a shy kitten is unlikely to be a successful fit. Do you want your cat to be indoor-only? Adult cats who previously lived indoors/outdoors may have trouble adjusting to an indoor-only life. White cats and cats with pink noses are susceptible to skin cancer and are not suitable for outdoor lifestyles. Considering these issues will guide you on choosing a cat with an appropriate temperament, colouring and background.

You need to consider the time and money you are prepared to spend, and be aware that a cat with any special needs will likely require more extensive veterinary care.

Kittens It is recommended that you adopt from a source where the personalities of kittens have been well-assessed (and where you are provided with the complete registration and medical records also). Good questions to ask are: what is the kitten's activity level? Is the kitten shy? Does the kitten get on well with other kittens/cats? How do they respond to new people and new situations? Adopting a pair of bonded littermates is a great idea if you plan to have more than one cat, as they are already friends and they will keep each other company when you are not home. It is essential to get to know each kitten as an individual and assess how they meet the requirements of your life and home, as discussed above. Cats have a tendency to either boldness or shyness, and while a shy kitten will become more comfortable and confident as they adjust to their new home, they are likely to remain wary of strangers and new situations into adulthood.

Cats Find out as much about the cat's background as you can: have they lived with dogs or other cats? Were their previous owners old or young? Did the cat have outdoor access or were they indoor only? There may be scant information available, especially if the cat was a stray. It is advisable to make multiple visits and to spend at least 30 minutes alone with any cat you are seriously considering adopting. Take careful note of how they respond to you: cats can be quite firm about their preferences for people.

Choosing a Pedigree Cat: Which Breed?

Extract from *Training Your Cat*

Dr Kersti Seksel, Registered Veterinary Specialist, Behavioural Medicine

There are over 40 recognised cat breeds so the selection is enormous. And then there are the myriad crossbreeds.

So, just how do you decide which breed is best for you and your family?

-Ask around. Word of mouth is one of the best recommendations you can have and people like talking about their pets. Ask cat owners if they are happy with their choice and what they would change if they could? Would they choose the same breed again? Why? Why not? Also ask them where they got their cat from, that is which breeder, which line?

-Go to cat shows. Look at the different breeds and how they interact with other animals and people. See how they react to being taken out of the cage, being handled by the judges, how they cope with strangers peering in at them in the cage.

-Ask your veterinarian for advice. Veterinarians have years of experience handling different breeds in a variety of situations. They have heard many stories from cat owners about the various breeds.

-Go to a good breeder (this may involve some travelling) and look at what the fully grown cat looks like. All kittens are cute and cuddly and it is easy to imagine them staying that way.

-Libraries are a good source of books with lots of information. Make use of the wealth of information around.

While each breed shows different behavioural characteristics, the cat's individual temperament is just as important. Time spent in research is never wasted when you are choosing a breed.

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