



Cats



Cats make ideal indoor companion animals. They are quiet and clean. They are usually quite independent and do not mind being alone some of the time. There are many purebred breeds of cats, but most pet cats are of no particular breed.

All domestic cats are of the same species. Within the species are a number of different breeds. Some of the best known are:

Long-Haired

Persian

Angora

Maine Coon

Norwegian Forrest cat

Short-Haired

Abyssinian

Domestic Short Hair

Special Short-Haired

Manx

Siamese

Burmese

Abyssinian cats probably came from Egypt. They make playful, entertaining family pets. Their short coat usually is light brown with black or grey markings. They sometimes have long hairs on the ends of their large ears; the end of the tail is black.

Domestic Short Hairs are the ordinary house cats, often called "alley cats" or "Boulevard cats", common throughout the world. Short hairs are often described as tabby, tiger, and tortoise shell because of their varied markings. They make excellent pets. Their coats may be white, black, grey, yellow or combinations of these. Many of these cats are striped.

Manx cats were imported from the Isle of Man. They make friendly, affectionate pets. Their short, thick coat can be almost any colour. They have short front legs, long rear legs, and the stub of a tail.

Persian cats probably originated in Afghanistan. They are larger and less active than most other breeds. They make quiet companions.

Siamese cats: Their short coat usually is light grey or yellowish tan with markings of a darker colour on the face, ears, feet and tail. The kittens are born white and become darker as they grow older. Today there are more Siamese cats living in the United States and other countries than in Siam.

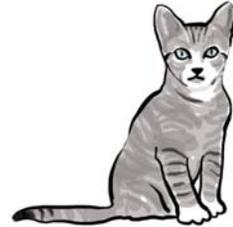
Sphynx cats have been specially bred to be hairless.

These are only a few of the many breeds. Plan to visit your local school or public library and find out more about the different breeds of cats, or do an internet or Pinterest search.

Selection

If you wish to have a purebred cat, you will have to spend some time looking for the breed that you want. You may attend a cat show in your area and get the name of a breeder with the kind of cats you want. You may have to order a kitten if they do not have any at that time. You may also find purebred kittens advertised in local newspapers. Purebred kittens may also be purchased at a local pet store.

If you don't want a purebred cat, you should be able to find a kitten in your own area. Watch the notice boards at grocery stores, the feed store, post office or at a veterinary clinic. You may also find kittens advertised in the pet section of the classified ads in your local newspaper. The humane society in your area will probably have kittens or older cats looking for a home.



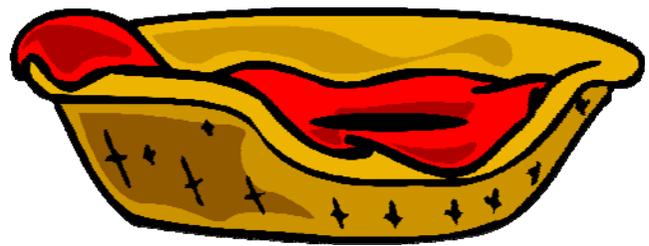
It is usually better to get a kitten because they will have an easier time getting used to their new home. An older cat may not settle into a new home very well. If you bring an older cat into your home, you should be very careful to keep it inside for at least a few days. Some older cats will run away if they have a chance to get outside. They may try to return to their old home.

If you choose to buy a kitten, be sure that it is in very good health. It should be about 8 weeks old, should be eating food from a bowl and be weaned from its mother's milk. Avoid kittens which have watery or runny eyes, a blocked nose or those which sneeze or have a hard time breathing. Diseases are common in young cats which have not been vaccinated, particularly if they are raised in the barn.

The kitten that you choose should be active and curious. It should be friendly and enjoy being petted. Avoid any kitten which seems nervous or hisses if you pick it up. These kittens may grow up disliking being handled.

Facilities

The cat may go from room to room and he may take naps on a bed or chair, but he should always have a box or basket of his own. It should be elevated to two or three inches above the floor.



Housing

Cats are usually kept inside the house or in a barn, particularly in the winter months. While they may spend time outside even on cold days, cats like to have a nice warm spot to curl up in when sleeping.

Because cats may be litter trained (trained to use a litter box as their "bathroom"), they may be kept indoors all of the time. This is usually safer for them. They do not like being tied on a chain or rope unless they are raised to do so as kittens. However, when they roam free, they are always in danger of being chased by a dog or hit by a car.

Equipment

You may try to fix up a sleeping place for your cat, BUT cats usually like to pick their own spot to sleep. They will usually want to sleep on a pillow on the couch, on a favorite chair, or even on your bed.

The cat should have its own food and water bowls. These should be washed out every day before refilling with food and water.

You should supply some form of scratching post for your cat to exercise its claws on. It enables him to keep claws in trim without scratching on rugs or furniture.

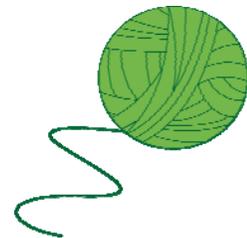
Cats like to scratch their front claws on wood or upholstery (or even curtains!). Because they can damage chairs, beds, or other objects, it is important to supply a scratching post early in life. This could be a short piece of log, taller than the cat, nailed to a base made from a piece of plywood. You might want to cover the log with a piece of scrap carpet (most cats will like this even better than plain wood). The scratching post should be tall enough so that the cat can stretch full length while scratching. It also should be sturdy enough so that the cat can't knock it over. If sprinkle some catnip around its base, your scratching post will be more appealing.



When your cat starts to scratch at something it shouldn't, take it to the scratching post and set its front feet on the post. In time, it will probably learn to use only the post for scratching.

Your kitten or cat will enjoy the simplest of toys and will play with them often. Here are some suggestions:

- ball that rattles
- cellophane and catnip bag
- a spool attached to a strong piece of string and hung from a chair or doorknob
- a rubber mouse that squeaks
- a ball of string or wool



Feeding

Many people think cats are picky eaters. In fact, most cats are easy to please. Find a brand of cat food that your cat will eat and feed it a variety of flavours to prevent a picky eater.

Some basic guidelines include:

- Kittens should be weaned at six to eight weeks of age.
- Kittens will start to eat and drink around four weeks of age. They need to be fed three to four times a day.
- Adult cats need to be fed twice a day. Feed about the same time at the same location.
- Cats have different nutritional needs at different ages. Vary the cat food to meet these needs.



- Feed a good prepared food. Most cats like semi-moist or canned food but dry food is good because it helps to keep a cat's teeth clean. Moist foods should be fed in small amounts which the cat can eat soon after serving. Dry food may be left in the bowl all day long for the cat to nibble on. Dry food should be in small pieces to prevent choking and moistened for kittens. Dry food which is in small flat, round or square pieces is better than food in chunks or ball-shapes. Provide food which is low in ash and magnesium.
- Cats should not be fed raw meat or have an all-meat diet. Do not feed dog food to a cat. Cats must have protein from meat, fish or milk and some dog foods have a large amount of grain.
- Provide clean water at all times. This is especially important if you are feeding dry food.
- Milk can cause digestive problems and is not required if you feed a good quality cat food.

If you are keeping a cat as a "mouser" in the barn, it should still be fed every day. This will not stop the cat from catching mice as a good mouser will hunt for mice for the pleasure of doing so.

Management

A healthy, well cared for cat has an average life of 10 to 14 years.

Grooming



Cats are very clean animals and like to spend many hours licking and grooming their coats. Short haired cats will need little grooming, but they will benefit from being brushed with a soft bristled brush. Long haired cats may get tangled fur, especially if they like to go outside. Brush them each day with a soft bristled brush. Gently remove tangles with fine-toothed comb. Long haired cats can swallow a lot of hair while licking their coats. They may need a laxative every now and then to help pass the hair balls that can develop.

Cats do not usually need to be bathed. If it is necessary to bathe a cat, wash it in warm water and a mild pet or baby shampoo. Be sure to rinse out all of the suds. Since the cat may not like being bathed it is a good idea to be sure the door is closed !

Dry it gently with a towel. You can wrap the cat in the towel and blot most of the water out of the fur. You can blow it dry with a hair dryer but be very careful that it doesn't get too hot. Do not let the cat out into cool air until its hair is completely dry.

Cats should have their nails trimmed when necessary. Hold the cat's foot with one hand. Use your thumb to press the centre large pad on the bottom of the cat's foot. This will make the cat's claws come out of their sheaths within the toes. you will then be able to snip the sharp hook off of the tip of each claw. Be very careful not to cut into the "quick" of the claw (the soft inner part of the claw where the nerves and veins are). You may wish to wrap your cat in a large towel while you are cutting its claws. You may finish the trimming job by using an emery board or a fine file to smooth the cut nails.

Handling

Kittens should be handled very gently so that they learn to enjoy being picked up and stroked. Be very careful not to drop your young cat. When you pick up a young kitten, you may pick it up by the loose skin over the shoulders with one hand while you slide your other hand under the cat to support its weight. Carry your cat snuggled against your chest with one arm underneath it to support its weight. Use your other hand to hold the cat against you so that it doesn't try to jump from your arm.

Older cats may be picked up in much the same way if they are small. Larger cats are usually picked up by putting one hand between the front legs with your palm on the cat's chest. Lift the front of the cat slightly and then place your other hand under the hind end of the cat to support its weight as you lift it up. Hold the cat against your chest with its weight supported on one arm. Use your free hand to hold the cat against you.

Never lift a cat up by his legs, or by holding the middle of his body. Always place your left hand under the cat's hindquarters, and your right hand between his front paws and under his chest.

If you must take your cat into a strange place, it should be taken in a carrying case or crate. A frightened cat can be very difficult to control as it scratches and fights to get away from you. This is very true if there are any strange dogs about.

Exercise

Cats can get most of the exercise that they need by playing around the house. Find out what the cat will enjoy playing with. Most cats like a small ball or other object that they can bat around the floor. Many cats like small stuffed toys that they can wrestle with. A little cloth mouse stuffed with catnip is a popular cat toy. An empty box or paper bag is also very entertaining for a cat or kitten.



You can have fun playing with your cat if you make a small toy which can be pulled along on a string. You can hide behind a chair or couch and toss the toy out where the cat can see it. Make the toy hop towards you by pulling the string in quick jerks. Your cat will have fun "hunting" and "attacking" its prey.

It may be difficult to teach your cat to go for a walk with you. If you wish to walk your cat on a leash, it is better to use a small harness (Figure 8 type) rather than a collar. Put the harness on for a little while each day. After a few days, attach the leash and let the cat walk around the house with the leash dragging. Keep a close eye on the cat to be sure that it does not become frightened by the leash or tangled around anything in the house. When the cat seems comfortable with the leash, begin taking it for very short walks. Pull gently on the leash when you want to go forward. When the cat starts forward, release the pressure on the leash. This will teach the cat to walk with you because it will learn that the leash only pulls when it doesn't follow you. If you do walk your cat, watch out for dogs that may run up and attack your cat.

Training

Most cats are very independent and do not like to do anything that they don't want to do. You don't usually reward a cat with food to get it to do what you ask.

Your cat should learn its name. Begin calling the cat by its name as soon as you bring it home. Use its name when you talk to it. Call it by its name when you put food in its bowl. If you have a treat for the cat, call its name and give it the treat when it comes.

Cats may be trained to wear a collar. If you put a collar on the cat while it is still young, it will learn to accept it. A stretch collar is best because it will slip off if it becomes snagged on something. The collar should be the kind that reflects light so that the cat may be seen if it goes outside at night.

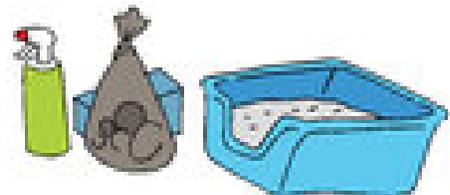
Some people put a small bell on their cat's collar to help warn birds that the cat is around. A name tag (with your name and telephone number) or a numbered rabies tag from your vet's clinic will help to identify the cat if it becomes lost.

If your cat will be inside most of the time, you will probably want to "litter train" it. You can do this by taking your kitten to its litter box first thing in the morning and last thing at night. It should be taken to the box right after eating each meal. It may help to keep the kitten confined to a small area of the house. The litter box should be in that area. Once the kitten is using the litter box regularly, you may let it loose in other areas of the house.

Be sure that the litter box is kept very clean. Do not use litters with deodorizers. A cat will not use a litter box which has become damp or soiled, but a *slightly* soiled litter may be helpful in first training the cat.

General Maintenance:

Cats are quite clean and easy to clean up after. Keep the cat's litter box very clean. When you change the litter, wash the litter box with detergent and warm water. Keep a special brush (a toilet brush works well), just for this job.



The litter box should not be cleaned by expectant women. Always wash your hands well after changing a cat's litter box.



Health Care

Care of a cat includes consideration of:

- *Vaccinations*: Very important, even if the cat stays inside all of the time. Talk to your veterinarian about vaccinations which are needed to keep a cat healthy. All cats should be vaccinated for rabies (for your protection as well as the cat's).
- *Internal parasites*: Talk to your veterinarian about worming. He/she will probably ask you to bring a stool sample (sample of the pet's droppings) in for examination under a microscope. Your veterinarian can then give you the right kind of worming medication needed to treat the worms.
- *Ear mites*: Cause dirty or scabby looking inner ears. These may be treated with mineral oil in the ear or your veterinarian will have an ear medication which will get rid of the mites.
- *Fleas*: May be a problem if your cat is scratching parts of its coat. Use a flea powder which is made for cats. You may also use a cat flea collar. Be certain that any powder or spray is made for use on cats because it may cause poisoning if it isn't.
- *Hairballs*: They can cause a cat to vomit. Put a small amount of petroleum jelly on the cat's nose. Once the cat licks it off, repeat the process. Continue until the cat has been given a thimble full of petroleum jelly over several applications.
- *Sicknesses* that should be cared for by the veterinarian are skin disease, colds, prolonged constipation, diarrhea, worms and immunization against infectious enteritis.



Breeding

If you plan to keep a mature male cat for a pet, have him castrated at five to six months of age. This will insure a gentle and reliable pet.

You may have your female cat spayed by a veterinarian. If you breed her, handle her as little as possible. Before the kittens are born, provide her with a comfortable box in a dark and secluded place.

A cat's gestation period is between 56 and 65 days. She is one of the best mothers in all the animal kingdom and will take excellent care of her babies.

Economics

Cats are such a popular pet that you can often find kittens that people are giving away free to good homes. If you are wanting to sell kittens, you are better advised to have purebred cats. There may be a small business opportunity available in caring for others' cats when they are away from home.

Project Resources



Pinterest - The Visual Discovery Tool

Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards - Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for cat information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering "cat" will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example , try domestic cat diet Or a specific breed of cat..

The following links may be of interest:

<http://www.animalplanet.com/pets/cats/>

<https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cat>

<https://www.rspca.org.uk/adviceandwelfare/pets/cats>

Sections of the Snake Fact Sheet were adapted with permission of Manitoba Agriculture from the Manitoba 4-H Project: Small Animals Leader's Manual - 1998. Portions of the fact sheet have been used with permission from Ontario 4-H and Saskatchewan 4-H Council.



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