

SMART KITTEN AND CAT BUYER'S GUIDE



If you're looking for a new cat or kitten, visit your local RSPCA or other reputable animal welfare or rescue organisation. If you can't find the right cat for you at these places, you'll need to find a good breeder. This guide will give you the important knowledge needed to be confident in finding your new cat.



Step 1 — Visit the RSPCA to see if we have the perfect cat or kitten for you.

At any time, the RSPCA has many different types and breeds of kittens and cats: short-haired and long-haired with a large variety of colours and personalities.

Regularly check with your local RSPCA and our adoption website www.adoptapet.com.au to see if your perfect feline friend has arrived at your local RSPCA centre.

RSPCA cats and kittens are checked to ensure they are suitable for adoption and are vaccinated, desexed and microchipped. Adopting a RSPCA cat or kitten also means you'll be giving the cat the opportunity to have a long and happy life.

GOODIE

Goodie's new family visited the RSPCA looking to adopt an older cat. When they met Goodie they decided that he was the one for them. Goodie and Cindy, the other family cat, are now inseparable.



SASSY & EDEN

Sassy and Eden's family decided to double the fun, love and companionship by adopting a pair of kittens from the RSPCA. The pair instantly became the best of friends.



Two kittens are twice the fun!

Moving in with a new family is a big change for a small kitten. There are lots of new people to meet, places to explore and toys to play with. With a fellow kitten to share this exciting journey, your kittens will always have comfort and companionship right by their sides.

Kittens are sociable creatures that adore each other's company. They speak the same language and enjoy the same games. Best of all, they are there to cuddle and play with each other when you aren't home, so they'll never be lonely.

The RSPCA recommends that you consider purchasing two cats together. For example two siblings, kittens of similar age, or any two cats that are known to get along.

Step 2 — If you can't find the right cat or kitten for you at the RSPCA, visit other reputable animal welfare or rescue organisations in your area.



Step 3 — If you can't find the right cat or kitten to adopt, then the next option is to find a good breeder.

Finding a good breeder means asking these important questions:

1. Did the breeder plan ahead for this litter?

A responsible cat breeder plans each pregnancy and knows there is enough demand for their kittens to ensure they all go to good homes.

- The mother cat should have reached full adult physical development prior to breeding and should not have been bred on her first heat.
- Ask how many litters the mother has already had and how frequently she has a litter.
- The breeding program should be based on veterinary advice, so ask which vet clinic the breeder goes to.
- What will they do with any unsold kittens? A good breeder will keep them until the right home can be found.

2. Are you impressed with the standard of care and living conditions of the cats?

It's really important that you visit the kitten in the place where it was born and meet its mum (and dad too, if possible).

- Is the place clean and free from unpleasant odours? There should be things for the kittens to safely play with and enough space to move around and be active.
- Are all the cats happy and healthy and in good body condition? You can check by gently feeling over the ribs. There should be some fat covering the rib area. Just looking is not enough as fluffy cats can be underweight under all their fur.
- Are the kittens and adult cats friendly with people and other cats? Can you approach and stroke the cats, or are they fearful? A good breeder will make sure their cats are well-socialised and bred for a temperament suited to being a pet.



- Are their eyes, nose and ears clear, without discharge? They should not be sneezing. Do they have well-groomed, shiny coats? There should be no fleas or patches of fur loss.
- Veterinary care:
 - Have the kittens had a full veterinary health check?
 - Are they microchipped, vaccinated and treated for worms and fleas before they are sold?
 - Are there documents from a veterinarian to confirm this?
- Is the kitten already desexed? A good breeder will provide information on desexing (if they are not already desexed) and registration requirements.



If the breeder can't answer the questions in this Guide adequately, is reluctant for you to visit, or wants you to meet the kitten in another place, find another breeder as they probably have something to hide.

Be aware that irresponsible breeders may use a different house as a 'shop front' so you don't see the poor conditions the cats are bred in.

3. Is the breeder genuinely concerned about the welfare of their cats?

Good breeders want the best for all their animals, from new kittens to retired breeding cats. They take steps to ensure this by providing detailed advice about the kitten's background and care requirements. Good breeders don't have old breeding cats euthanased just because they're no longer productive.

- Ask what happens to their retired breeding animals — are they kept by the breeder or rehomed? Retired breeding cats can make great pets.

CAT CONTAINMENT

The RSPCA encourages the containment of cats in an enclosed area, at a minimum from dusk until dawn. Containment of cats during this period can help to protect cats from disease and injuries that occur through fighting and accidents, increase the opportunity for owners and cats to interact, reduce the impact of hunting by cats and disturbance to neighbours.

You need to ensure contained cats have access to:

- adequate exercise
- plenty of horizontal and vertical space
- scratching posts and toys to play with
- places for hiding and sleeping
- windows to look outside
- litter trays
- fresh drinking water and food.

Access to an outdoor escape-proof enclosure, owner supervised trips outside and having two cats that get along well can greatly increase activity and stimulation.

It's important to get your cat or kitten used to being contained early. For tips on how to contain your cat or kitten, go to www.rspca.org.au



4. Does the breeder make sure that you and the kitten will suit each other?

A new kitten is a long-term commitment as cats can live up to 20 years of age or more, so both you and the breeder need to be certain you are making the right decision.

A well-socialised kitten should literally choose you. It should be outgoing and enjoy interacting with humans, not withdrawing or hissing. The kitten should be playful while you're there and enjoy being picked up. **It is really important to interact with the kitten before purchase.**

A good breeder will ask you questions to make sure this is the right kitten for you and you're able to care for it properly.

The breeder might ask:

- If you have other animals?
- How long and often will the kitten be left on its own?
- What type of space will the kitten have access to? Indoor, secure outdoor or both?

The breeder should tell you what to expect from this breed/type of cat, such as the level of grooming required. Longer haired cats generally need a lot of grooming.

If you are at all uncomfortable with what you are told, you might want to consider another type of cat. Your local RSPCA or vet can provide advice.

5. Is your kitten bred to be a pet, healthy and free from known inherited disorders?

Infectious diseases

The breeder should be aware of, and take action to prevent:

- Cat flu and feline panleucopaenia (feline enteritis). Vaccinations address these diseases.
- Feline infectious peritonitis (FIP), ringworm and ear mites. Certain breeds are predisposed to FIP so it's important to do some research.
- Feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FELV). The breeder should be able to provide you with evidence the cattery is tested and free from these diseases.

Inherited diseases

Different breeds are predisposed to different inherited diseases. Some of these aren't apparent until later in a cat's life, but can have devastating consequences.

- Find out what inherited diseases occur in your chosen breed (an internet search for inherited diseases and the breed name will help you and you can also ask your vet).
- Ask the breeder what steps they have taken to prevent the diseases.

- Check whether there is any legislation or codes of practice about inherited diseases that apply in your location and ask what the breeder does to comply.

Inbreeding

One proven way to minimise inherited problems is to avoid inbreeding. Inbreeding can also negatively affect immune system function, which is another important reason to avoid it.

- Can the breeder demonstrate that there are no close relative matings, such as father-daughter or grandfather-granddaughter?

Exaggerated physical features

Some breeds have exaggerated features that can cause suffering, like a very flat squashed-in face, which makes it very hard to breathe, or other unusual physical features. For example, breeds such as Twisty cats, Scottish Folds and Manx cats can have inherited physical deformities that can cause chronic pain and a shortened life.

Good breeders proactively plan to prevent health and temperament problems.

The breeder must be aware of and screen for any known inherited diseases or physical problems specific to the breed.

- Can the breeder show you veterinary reports and screening tests to confirm this?

A breeder should breed to minimise exaggerated features that have an adverse impact on the welfare of the cat and they will exclude cats with health or temperament problems from breeding.

A good breeder should put health, welfare and temperament above appearance. Some breeders put success in the show ring above all else, but breed prizes such as 'best in show' don't mean that a cat's kittens will be suitable family pets, as show cats are judged primarily on their appearance, not their behaviour or health.



JEREMY

Jeremy's family visited the RSPCA looking to adopt a cat. They fell in love with the handsome feline and knew he had to become part of the family.



6. Does the breeder offer to provide ongoing support and information after purchase and do they provide a guarantee?

A good breeder will provide full contact details and encourage you to get in touch if you need more information on the care of your new kitten.

What if you take the kitten home and things don't work out?

A good breeder will provide a guarantee and offer to take back your kitten within a specified time period after sale. Some breeders also take the cat back if life circumstances change and the owner can't care for the cat anymore.



7. Does the breeder provide references and meet all their legal requirements?

A good breeder will be able to provide references on request from other owners and their vet.

Legal requirements for cat breeders vary from state to state. It's best to call the local council in the breeder's area and ask whether breeders have to be registered with them and if there is a code of practice or guidelines they should be following. If the answer is yes, you can ask the breeder for their council registration details and what guidelines they follow.

Pedigree or purebred cat breeders may also be referred to as 'registered breeders' when they are members of an association that operates a register. However, being 'registered' with the council and/or an association does not necessarily mean a breeder meets good animal welfare standards. To make sure the breeder is a good breeder it's important to visit the breeding place and ask the questions provided in this guide.

PET SHOPS, MARKETS, AND INTERNET AND NEWSPAPER ADVERTISEMENTS

If you're not adopting from the RSPCA or other reputable animal welfare or rescue organisation then it's important you don't buy from a pet shop, market or through an internet or newspaper advertisement (or any other way) without being able to visit the animal's home, as you can't check out the conditions in which the kitten was bred or check the mother cat is happy and healthy.

ACCEPTING A KITTEN OR CAT FROM A FRIEND OR NEIGHBOUR

If a friend or neighbour's cat has kittens and they offer you one and you decide to accept the kitten, encourage them to desex the mother cat as soon as possible. **Desexing is important as cats can become pregnant again just 4 weeks after giving birth to a litter** and it will be increasingly difficult to find good homes for all the kittens. Kittens need to be desexed by 4 months and vaccinated, microchipped and registered with your local council.

FEEDING TIPS

Feed a high quality, balanced commercial product (including balanced wet food) appropriate for your cat's life stage that complies with the Australian Standard for Pet Food. Raw meaty bones may be offered to help keep teeth and gums healthy (for example 1–2 raw chicken wings per week with a few days in between each serving). Bones must be raw.

Raw meat or bones must be **human-grade** because some pet meat products can contain sulphite preservatives which can cause fatal thiamine deficiency.

Cats are obligate carnivores — they must have a source of animal tissue and meat in their diet.

For more cat care advice, see the RSPCA Australia knowledgebase: www.kb.rspca.org.au

Follow our Smart Kitten and Cat Buyer's Guide and you'll be on the right track to taking home a healthy and happy cat.



OTHER USEFUL LINKS

Adoptapet: www.adoptapet.com.au

RSPCA Australia: www.rspca.org.au

RSPCA Knowledgebase: kb.rspca.org.au

RSPCA Pet Insurance: www.rspcapetinsurance.org.au

WHY DESEXING IS SO IMPORTANT

Desexing isn't just about reducing the large oversupply of cats, it can actually make your cat healthier and happier.

Desexed cats are:

- usually more affectionate
- less inclined to roam, therefore less likely to become lost or hit by a car
- better protected from certain illnesses and diseases
- generally less aggressive towards other cats
- less likely to experience cat fight related injuries and contract feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV)
- less inclined to mark their territory through urination
- prevented from displaying undesirable 'on heat' behaviours such as restlessness and being highly vocal
- likely to live longer.

The RSPCA desexes kittens from the age of eight weeks when the surgery is simple and recovery is rapid and smooth. If your kitten was not desexed prior to sale, they must be desexed before they are able to produce any kittens.

Cats can become pregnant as early as 4 months of age. There is absolutely no benefit in letting females have one litter before they are desexed.

Talk to your vet about desexing and general kitten and cat care.

