

RSPCA 

for all creatures **great & small**

THE SMART KITTEN AND CAT BUYER'S GUIDE

Helping you make the right decisions
for you & your new best friend



If you're looking for a new feline companion, follow our Smart Kitten and Cat Buyer's Guide and you'll be on the right track to bringing home a happy and healthy kitten or cat. You'll also be helping to prevent the sale of kittens from kitten farms or irresponsible breeders.

You can also check out the [RSPCA online advertising guidelines](#) which were developed in response to strong interest and demand from the community, and to help online retailers develop good policies that protect animals and improve consumer trust.

Step 1

Check your local RSPCA or other reputable animal welfare or rescue groups first.

At any time, the RSPCA has many different types and breeds of kittens and cats with a large variety of personalities and appearances (including short- and long- haired, and different colours). Regularly check with your local RSPCA and our adoption website www.adoptapet.com.au to see if your ideal 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 are helping the RSPCA to take care of even more animals in need.

You can also contact and visit other reputable animal welfare or rescue organisations in your area to look for your new cat or kitten. If you are unable to find a cat from an animal welfare organisation, another option is to adopt a cat who is being rehomed privately. Adopting directly from the previous owner gives you the opportunity to ask lots of questions and do your due diligence (e.g., by visiting the place where the animal has been kept).

Thinking of having a multi-cat home?

If you are wanting to have more than one feline family member, consider adopting two kittens who are littermates or adopting two cats together who are already bonded and get along well (these kitten/cat combinations may be more likely to get along and live happily together compared to kittens/cats who are not littermates or bonded cats).

Consider whether you can provide an environment that meets the physical and mental needs of more than one cat, as each cat needs multiple and separated resources immediately available to them at all times (e.g., food, water, toileting areas, scratching areas, play areas, and areas to rest, sleep, and hide.). All cats are individuals, and some love the company of other cats, but many others prefer to not to live with other cats.

If you do bring more than one feline into your life, make sure they are introduced in a way that maximises the chance of a successful and happy multi-cat home; but keep in mind that a harmonious multi-cat household is not guaranteed. Read more about how to introduce your new kitten or cat to an existing cat on the [RSPCA Knowledgebase](#).

Having other cats living in the same space is often a significant cause of stress for cats. The impact of this can be minimised by providing each of them with multiple and separated essential resources, but there may still be tension between cats and this can contribute to poor mental and physical wellbeing.

If you can't find the right kitten or cat to adopt straight away, keep looking - the right one for you might be available soon.

If you have your heart set on a specific breed or type of cat, remember that reputable animal welfare or rescue organisations may have kittens and cats of specific breeds/types. There are sometimes even rescue organisations for specific breeds.

But if over time you still can't find the right pet for you, another option is to find a responsible breeder.

It is a good idea to see your veterinarian for a pre-purchase consultation to discuss the breed or type of cat you are considering. Your veterinarian can give you expert information about important considerations such as any special needs and known health or welfare issues associated with the breed (and what the potential management and treatment options might be for these, and costs involved). This could assist your decision making and help you be prepared.

Step 2

If you can't find the right cat or kitten to adopt, follow our Smart Kitten and Cat Buyer's Guide to help you find a responsible breeder.

For happy and healthy kittens (and satisfied owners!), it's best to look for breeders who:

- Plan ahead and aim to find good homes for every kitten they breed.
- Provide a high standard of care and living conditions for all their cats.
- Are genuinely concerned about the welfare of their cats.
- Are open to questions and provide a complete history of the kitten.
- Make sure that you will suit the kitten and the kitten will suit you.
- Breed to produce happy, healthy cats, free from known inherited disorders.
- Provide ongoing support and information to new owners.
- Provide a guarantee to take back the animal within a specified time period after sale. They should also offer to accept animals returned as a result of problems arising from an inherited disorder at any time after sale.
- Provide references on request.
- Meet all their legal requirements.



Asking these important questions will help you to find a responsible breeder:

1. Did the breeder plan ahead for this litter?

A responsible cat breeder plans each litter and knows that they can find compatible and responsible homes for the kittens before they start breeding.

- Ask the breeder if this litter was planned, and what they will do with any unsold kittens. A responsible breeder will keep their kittens until the right home can be found or provide them with a lifelong home if an alternative home cannot be found.
- The breeding program should be based on veterinary advice, so ask which veterinary clinic the breeder uses.

2. Are you impressed with the kittens' and cats' wellbeing, living conditions, and the standard of the care they are receiving?

To ensure that you can check what conditions your potential kitten has been raised in, it's really important that you visit the kittens in the place where they were born and raised and meet their mum (and dad and litter-mates too, if possible). This will also help you to avoid supporting irresponsible breeders and kitten farms which cause suffering to cats and kittens.

- Do all the kittens and adult cats seem happy and healthy and in good body condition? Just looking is not enough, as cats can be under or over weight under all their hair (especially fluffy cats). So, with a light touch and flat hands feel all over the cat's body to help assess their body condition score. To help you understand what is an ideal shape for your cat, Royal Canin has a great online tool that allows you to identify your cat's [Body Condition Score](#) with just a few questions. Remember the perfect score is 5.
- 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.
- Are the kittens and adult cats free from injury and moving freely and easily?

- Is the kitten eight weeks of age or will they be when you would be allowed to take them home? Kittens should not be removed from their mother for adoption or purchase before eight weeks of age and must be fully weaned.
- Watch how the kittens and adult cats behave - are they friendly and calm around people? Do they approach you and allow you to stroke them, or are they timid or fearful?
- The critical period for kitten socialisation is generally between approximately 2 and 9 weeks of age. This is when the kitten gets used to and learns to cope with sounds, sights, smells, and touch, and learns how to interact with other cats, animals, and people. The kitten's experiences during this critical period of learning and development can influence and shape their behaviour for their whole life. A responsible breeder will make sure their kittens are bred for a temperament suited to living happily with people and are well socialised (aiming for multiple sessions of gentle and positive interactions with people every day and gradual and positive introduction to experiences, sounds, sights, smells, and touch that the kittens are likely to encounter in their life).
- Veterinary care:
 - Have the kittens had a full veterinary health check?
 - Are they microchipped, vaccinated, and treated for worms and fleas?
 - Are there documents from a veterinarian to confirm this?
 - Is the kitten already desexed?
 - A responsible breeder will provide information on desexing (if the kittens are not already desexed), vaccination, identification, and registration requirements.
 - The RSPCA recommends that kittens are desexed before puberty (at or by 16 weeks of age). Some of the benefits of desexing cats before puberty include improved surgical outcomes, shorter recovery times from anaesthesia, lower overall complication rate, and faster wound healing.

- ❑ When visiting the kitten, ask to see where they have been kept. Although you may be introduced to the kitten in a house, they may not usually be kept there. Are there food bowls, bedding, scratching posts, litter trays, toys, hiding places etc. that would indicate that this is where the kitten is normally kept?
- ❑ Is the place where the cats and kittens are kept clean and free from unpleasant odours?
- ❑ Is there enough space for the kittens and adult cats to move around, play, and exercise? There should be things for the kittens to safely play with, and enough space for them and their mother to move around and be active.
- ❑ Do the cats and kittens have access to clean fresh water and fresh uncontaminated food? What are the cats and kittens being fed and how often? A responsible breeder will provide information on how to feed your kitten.

If the breeder is reluctant for you to visit or wants you to meet the kitten in a place other than where they normally keep the kittens and adult cats, this raises big red flags. Be aware that kitten farms and irresponsible breeders may use a different house as a 'shop front' so you don't see the poor conditions the cats are bred and kept in. They may want to meet you or sell you the kitten from somewhere other than the property where the animal is kept (or arrange "delivery"), and this should raise concern.

You should avoid buying a kitten without being able to visit their home, as you can't check out the conditions in which the kitten was bred or know where they came from.



Desexing

Desexing (or sterilisation) isn't just about reducing the large number of unwanted cats; it can have health and welfare benefits for your cat.

Desexed cats:

- May be less inclined to roam and, consequently, less likely to become lost or hit by a car (although keeping your cat contained to your property will also prevent this).
- Are at reduced risk of specific diseases related to the reproductive tract.
- May be less likely to experience cat fight related injuries and, consequently, contract feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) .
- May be less inclined to urine spray in the home.
- Won't display undesirable 'on heat' behaviours such as 'calling' (being highly vocal while trying to attract a mate).

Cats can become pregnant as early as 16 weeks of age. If your kitten was not desexed prior to sale and is not intended for breeding, they should be desexed at or before 16 weeks of age so they will not produce any unintended litters of kittens. There is no benefit in females having a litter before they are desexed.

Being a responsible cat owner includes taking important actions like desexing, microchipping, and vaccinating your cat. These should be considered as part of a more comprehensive list of actions you should discuss with your veterinarian who can advise you about how to best care for your cat and help keep your new best friend happy and healthy.

KEEP YOUR CAT SAFE AND HAPPY AT HOME

The RSPCA encourages the containment of cats within the boundaries of the owner's property in a way that safeguards cat welfare. Containment of cats can have many benefits, including helping to protect them from disease, injury, fighting, and accidents, and reducing the impact of hunting by cats and disturbance to neighbours.

Cat containment must be implemented in a way that safeguards cat welfare. Contained cats must be provided with an environment that meets their physical and mental needs, allows and encourages the expression of normal feline behaviours, minimises stress, and promotes good health and welfare.

It is vital to ensure your cat has:

- Choice about how and where they eat, drink, rest, play, scratch, and toilet, and opportunities to engage in normal behaviours that are important to them like stalking, pouncing, climbing, scratching, hiding, retreating, and exploring.
- Adequate exercise and fresh air.
- Plenty of horizontal and vertical space.
- Safe places for privacy, hiding, and sleeping.
- Private, safe, and clean litter trays.
- Choice and control in their lives, including choice about how or if to interact with the environment, and people, animals, and objects in it.
- Choice about how and where they eat, drink, rest, play, scratch, and toilet, and opportunities to engage in normal behaviours that are important to them like stalking, pouncing, climbing, scratching, hiding, retreating, and exploring.

Contained cats do not have to live totally indoors. Access to a safe outdoor escape-proof enclosure or fenced garden is highly recommended as this greatly assists in providing an environment that meets your cat's physical and mental needs, including increasing the opportunity for activity and stimulation by allowing them to experience the benefits of the outdoors without the dangers of roaming beyond their home property boundaries.

It's important to get your cat or kitten used to being contained early. See the RSPCA Australia [Safe and Happy Cats guide](#) for more information.

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

Responsible 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. Responsible breeders don't have old breeding cats euthanased just because they're no longer productive.

- Ask about how old the mother is and how old she was when she had her first litter and was she bred on her first season.
- Ask how many litters the mother has already had and how frequently she has had a litter.
- The mother should have reached full adult physical development prior to breeding and should not have been bred on her first heat. Speak to your veterinarian about the minimum and maximum acceptable age for breeding and maximum number of litters for the type and breed of cat you are considering. There may also be legal requirements that cat breeders in your state or territory must meet (e.g., the minimum and maximum age at which a queen may be bred). You can find more information [here](#). Prior to breeding, cats should be checked by a veterinarian and confirmed to be in good health and fit to breed.
- Ask the breeder what happens to their retired breeding animals – are they kept by the breeder or rehomed? Retired breeding cats can be great companion animals.
- Cats and kittens should have opportunities for positive human-animal interactions, they should display natural and varied activity patterns, be comfortable and confident in their surroundings, positively respond to human interactions, and they should have choice over what they do and when and not show signs of fear or stress.
- Responsible breeders want to make sure you are well-informed about your new kitten and will provide information on the background, size, breed, and temperament of their parents, as well as any relevant medical history, including inherited diseases or predispositions. You should also be provided with information on diet, socialisation, registration and identification requirements, and any medications or vaccinations given or required in the future.
- The breeder should be willing to answer questions and allow inspection of records and paperwork that are relevant to the kitten such as registration documents and veterinary records. The breeder should also disclose if the kitten has been treated by a veterinarian for any reason prior to the sale. A refusal to answer reasonable questions should raise red flags.

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 for more than 20 years, so both you and the breeder need to be certain you are making the right decision.

It is really important to interact with the kitten before making the decision to bring them home.

A well-socialised kitten should not show signs of fear such as hissing or swiping when interacting with humans. Each individual cat varies in how sociable they'll want to be with humans but, in general, a kitten who is going to be a companion cat should be comfortable being handled appropriately by people.

Ask the breeder questions about the kitten's experiences with people, adult cats, other animals, and other experiences (e.g., if they are used to the noise and movement of a vacuum cleaner, washing machine, radio, TV, car, etc.).

A responsible breeder will ask you questions to make sure you are a suitable match for this kitten and that you're able to care for the kitten well and provide for their physical and mental needs.

For example, they might ask:

- Do you have other animals? What animals are these and how sociable are they?
- If you have children, and if so, talk to you about whether the breed/type of kitten is suitable for families with children.
- How long and often will the kitten be left on their own?
- What type of space will the kitten have access to? Indoors, both indoors and a secure outdoor area, or uncontained outdoor access?

- What will you do to provide the kitten with a home that meets their physical and mental needs? For example, what resources and stimulation will you provide such as opportunities to rest, hide, perch, play, scratch, stalk, pounce, and scratch?
- Are you aware of the cat breed/type specific care requirements? For example, if the kitten has a flat or brachycephalic face, you will need to take extra care with hot weather and air travel due to the breathing difficulties and heat intolerance that may be associated with the kitten's exaggerated features. Are you aware of the amount of grooming that will be required, particularly for long or thick coated breeds/types who might need a lot of grooming?

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

DID YOU KNOW?

A kitten farm (also known as a kitten factory or kitten mill) is an intensive cat breeding facility that is operated under inadequate conditions that fail to meet the cats' physical and mental needs. Kitten farms are usually large-scale commercial operations, but inadequate conditions may also exist in small-volume breeding establishments which may or may not be run for profit.



5. Is your kitten bred to be a companion cat and healthy and free from disease?

Talk to a veterinarian about the breed you are thinking of getting and look at reputable resources to make sure that the breed is right for you and you know what to expect.

Infectious diseases

- All kittens and adult cats should have had their core vaccinations to protect against cat flu (feline calicivirus and feline herpes virus) and feline panleukopaemia (feline parvovirus). Ask the breeder what vaccinations their veterinarian has recommended for their cats and ask your own veterinarian what vaccines your kitten needs.

For more information about vaccinating cats, visit the [RSPCA Knowledgebase](#).

- There is evidence that there may be a genetic component in susceptibility to feline infectious peritonitis (FIP) and it may be more common in certain breeds or lines of cats. Therefore, it is important to learn about this disease and find out if the breed may be susceptible to FIP and if the breeder has a history of FIP in their cats.
- The breeder should be able to provide you with evidence the cattery is tested and free from feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) and feline leukaemia virus (FELV).
- The kittens and adult cats should be free of fungal disease and parasitic infections (e.g., ringworm, ear mites, fleas, worms).

Inherited diseases and exaggerated features

Different breeds can be predisposed to different inherited disorders or diseases. Some of these aren't apparent until later in a cat's life, but can have devastating consequences. Some breeds also have exaggerated features that can cause problems, like a flat or brachycephalic face, which makes it hard for them to breathe, and intolerant of hot weather. [Breeds such as Scottish Folds](#) should not be bred as they have a genetic mutation that causes painful deformities and disease associated with the breed's characteristic features like folded ears and short deformed legs.

A responsible breeder will be aware of, and screen for, any known disorders or anatomical problems specific to the breed and will exclude cats with problems from breeding. They will be able to show you copies of veterinary reports and screening tests to confirm this. They should also avoid breeding for exaggerated physical features that compromise cat welfare.

- Find out what inherited diseases and other health and welfare issues (e.g., those associated with exaggerated features) may occur in the breed you are considering and ask the breeder what steps they have taken to screen for and prevent these.
- Check whether there is any legislation or codes of practice relating to inherited diseases that apply in your location and, if so, ask what the breeder does to comply.
- One proven way to minimise the risk of inherited problems is to avoid breeding closely related animals. If you are buying a purebred cat, you should check the kitten's pedigree to make sure there are no close relative matings, such as brother-sister or grandfather-granddaughter matings.
- Ask the breeder what they think are the most important characteristics in their kittens. A good breeder will put health, welfare, and temperament above appearance.

DID YOU KNOW?

Pedigree or purebred cat breeders may also be referred to as 'registered breeders' when they are members of an association that operates a stud book or register. The term may also be used to refer to someone who is registered with their local council as a breeder (also called a 'recognised' breeder).

While breed associations generally have rules and guidelines for their members, being 'registered' does not necessarily mean a breeder is responsible or meets good animal welfare standards.

To find a responsible breeder it's important to visit the place where they breed and keep their animals and ask the right questions before you buy. This guide was written to help you know what to look for and what questions to ask.

6. Does the breeder offer to provide ongoing support and information after purchase?

- A responsible 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.

7. Does the breeder provide a guarantee?

- What if you take the kitten home and he/she has a health problem, or doesn't get on with your family (e.g., children, adults, and other companion animals) and it turns out to not be the right fit? A responsible breeder will offer to take back unwanted animals within a specified time period after sale. They should also offer to accept animals returned as a result of problems arising from an inherited disorder at any time after sale.

8. Does the breeder provide references to back up what they have told you?

- You've asked a lot of questions, but you'd like to be sure that the breeder is genuine. A responsible breeder will readily provide references on request, including testimonials from previous or existing owners of their kittens, documentation and testimonial from their veterinarian, and documents indicating membership of a breed association or companion animal club where relevant.

9. Is the breeder meeting all legal requirements?

- Legal requirements for cat breeders vary across jurisdictions. 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.

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

Before you take your kitten or cat home, check out the RSPCA Knowledgebase for information on cat care and visit our [Safe and Happy Cats website](#).

Accepting a kitten or cat from a friend or neighbour

If a friend or neighbour's cat has kittens and they offer you one, encourage them to desex the mother cat as soon as possible (whether you decide to accept the kitten or not). Desexing is important as cats can become pregnant again just four weeks after giving birth to a litter and it will likely be increasingly difficult to find good homes for all the kittens. Kittens should be desexed at or before 16 weeks of age and vaccinated, microchipped, and registered with your local council where applicable.

Useful links:

RSPCA Adoptapet adoptapet.com.au

RSPCA Australia rspca.org.au

RSPCA Knowledgebase kb.rspca.org.au

RSPCA Pet Insurance rspcapetinsurance.org.au





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