

Choosing the Right Type of Cat for Your Family

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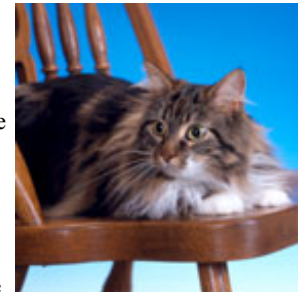
Unlike dogs, most cats are the same basic size and shape, but there are differences, which are important considerations in choosing the right type of cat for you. Asking yourself the following questions may help you in selecting a cat. Always keep in mind the needs of the cat, which include making sure the cat fits into the environment you will be able to provide.

What activities would you enjoy doing with your cat?

Some breeds of cats are known for their laid-back attitude, including Persians and Ragdolls. Most cats of these breeds are perfectly content to sit and watch the world go by (or revolve around them). If you want a cat who will be content being with you while you sit and read a book or watch TV, these breeds would be good choices, although, of course, there are always individual variations. On the other hand, Siamese and Abyssinian cats have a higher activity level and prefer to be with you wherever you are, joining in every activity, and even going on walks or hikes. It will take you longer to make the bed, fold the laundry, and type on the computer as the cat tries to 'help' you out.

How much time are you willing to devote to grooming?

Some owners enjoy spending time to keep their pet looking her best, while others consider it a burdensome chore. All cats should be regularly groomed, but the definition of the word "regular" can mean different things depending upon coat type. The coats of most cats with longer hair become more easily matted and require more frequent brushing, and sometimes bathing. When long-haired cats shed, it takes more time to keep your clothes, furniture, etc. free from hair. Hairballs can be more of a problem too, especially if you do not groom your cat enough. Cats of the Sphynx breed have only short, fine hair on the body, and require regular bathing or toweling off to remove the excess natural oils from the skin.



Do you have children or other pets?

Individual cats vary as to how well they interact with children and other pets. Kittens who were exposed to children and other animals at 2 weeks of age and thereafter will be better suited to living in a household with children and other pets. Some breeds that have a tendency to do better with children and be more accepting of other pets include the Domestic Shorthair, Exotic Shorthair, Maine Coon, Persian, Turkish Van, Ragdoll, American Curl, Himalayan, and Manx. Remember these are generalities, and do not predict the personality of a specific cat.

Is the sex of the cat important to you?

Some people prefer a female or a male cat. For some breeds of cats, such as the Norwegian Forest Cat, there is a considerable size difference between the sexes, with the males being up to three times as large. If you want a [calico cat](#), you will, in virtually all cases, be getting a female. If you already have a cat (that is spayed or neutered), it is sometimes best to try to get a cat of the opposite sex.

Various behaviors are more common, depending upon the sex of the cat. Unneutered male cats are much more likely to have behavioral problems such as [urine spraying](#). Unspayed female cats who vocalize and have other behaviors (such as rolling) when they come into heat can frustrate many owners. We strongly encourage pet owners to have their cats spayed or neutered for these and many other reasons, including the prevention of various diseases and cancers.

Is the age of the cat important to you?

There are disadvantages in starting out with a kitten versus an adult cat. It is always more difficult to determine the ultimate personality of any cat when she is evaluated during her first few weeks of life. A nine-week-old kitten you may be looking at is approximately two years old in human terms. Who can predict what the personality of a child will be during the "terrible twos?"

Many experienced cat owners would remind us that this is a two-edged sword. While we may not be able to predict the future personality of a kitten, by starting with a cat of this age we will be able to have a greater effect on his development and ultimate behavior. Cats are just like people in that many traits of their personality are a result of their genetic background. However, they are also a product of their surroundings. A kitten that finds herself in a loving home where she can interact with people during play, grooming, and at other times will probably turn out much differently than a littermate that was kept as an outdoor cat, and only fed on occasion. By choosing a kitten, you have the potential to have a much greater effect on their personality than if you start with an adult.

Selecting a kitten versus an adult typically means a much higher demand on your time. Kittens have to grow through some less-than-delightful phases such as climbing drapes, knocking over knick-knacks, and entering every open door or cupboard. They also require more trips to the veterinarian for vaccinations and wormings, additional expenses for neutering, and so on. The selection of an adult cat bypasses most of these. To many, kittenhood is the best part and they love the involvement - other potential owners simply struggle to find the extra time.

In addition to the time commitment necessary for a younger cat, many soon-to-be cat owners take into account the fact that cats are now living to their mid-teens, and some even into their twenties. Taking care of a cat for her lifetime is a long-term

commitment. Some elderly people and those with plans for major lifestyle changes in a decade or so, may prefer adopting an older cat.

Do you want a purebred or a crossbred cat?

Should your new cat be a purebred or a crossbred? For some, a particular breed is the only cat that comes to mind. When they were growing up, their parents had a Persian so they automatically look for a Persian. Before you consider selecting from the over 40 currently listed and officially recognized cat breeds, you need to understand the differences and pros and cons of a purebred versus a crossbred.

Possible advantages of purebreds: If you are seeking a cat with a specific appearance, you are probably better off choosing a purebred that has been selectively bred with that appearance in mind. For instance, someone who wants a large cat with longer hair may want to consider a Maine Coon or Norwegian Forest cat. If you want a cat that is very vocal and talks back to you, a Siamese cat would fit the bill.

Possible advantages of cross breeds: Keep in mind when thinking about purebred cats that many man-made alterations in the basic structure or color have brought along some disadvantages. Whenever breeders select for one trait, they may unknowingly select for many others. For instance, Persians, with their very short noses, may have difficulty breathing. Manx cats have a much higher risk of spinal problems and weak hindquarters.

When considering your choice between a purebred and a crossbred, do not forget the [cost](#). Purebred kittens have been known to cost \$300 to \$3,000 depending on the particular lines and breed. The basic domestic shorthairs are often free or have a small adoption fee.

Summary

The cat you bring home will hopefully be a part of your life for many, many years. For this partnership to be the best for both of you, it is important you make the right choice. If you are unsure and need more information, talk to cat breeders, veterinarians, and other cat owners. Read as much as you can about the different types or breeds of cats. We have been brief here, but almost all of the breeds listed by the Cat Fancier's Association have several books devoted just to them. Today, there are also hundreds and hundreds of good books and magazine articles dealing with every phase of pet ownership. The best choices are informed choices.

