

Golden Rules for Cat Owners

1. Think before you buy

One of the first things to think about is whether you want a traditional "moggie" cat – a cat of mixed breed, or a pedigree cat. To help you with your decision, you can visit www.dogscats.asn.au and take the Select-a-Pet test to find out which cat would best suit your lifestyle. If you decide you do want a pedigree cat, it would be time well spent to research the various breeds by talking to breeders and attending cat shows.

If the mixed breed cat is the one for your family, the RSPCA, Animal Welfare League and many vet clinics have lots of cats that need loving homes. Cats or kittens purchased from shelters or cat adoption centres are usually desexed, vaccinated and microchipped.

2. Cat or Kitten

If you are ready to bring a cat into your life, consider adopting an older cat instead of buying a kitten.

Kittens develop normal behaviour by spending time with their mother and the rest of the litter. If you must have a kitten, then wait until they are eight to ten weeks old before adopting it.

There are many advantages to purchasing an older cat and you might save a life!

3. Desex your cat before it can breed

Thousands of unwanted kittens are destroyed by animal shelters every year as there are not enough homes for them. If more male and female cats are desexed, there will be fewer unwanted kittens in our community. Many kittens can be purchased already desexed but if your new kitten has not been desexed make sure this is done before it reaches 4 months old. Male and female cats can be desexed anytime after they are eight weeks old.

4. Identify your cat

If your cat strays, you will have a better chance of getting it back if it can be identified. An ID tag on the collar and/or a microchip can help identify your cat. You can also save costs and help your cat by having it desexed and microchipped at the same time. Thousands of beautiful cats have to be destroyed each year because they cannot be reunited with their owners. Cats that are not identified may be lawfully seized, detained, destroyed or otherwise disposed. Don't let that happen to your cat.

5. Keep your neighbours happy

Many people know that dogs can cause neighbour disputes. So can cats! Before purchasing your cat, consider confining your cat to the house or a garden enclosure. Cats that roam can upset neighbours by using their gardens as a toilet and upsetting their pets. Cats are also territorial creatures and male cats will fight noisily when a female cat is in heat.

6. Keep you cat safe

Free-roaming cats often fight with other cats. The resulting bites and scratches can cause nasty infections and diseases. A large number of cats are killed or seriously injured by traffic. Free-roaming cats can also kill native wildlife, especially birds and lizards. Consider confining your cat to your house or a garden enclosure.

7. Don't feed stray cats

Stray male cats often get into fights and have an average life expectancy of only 18 months. If you feed stray cats, you are encouraging them to stray. Only feed a cat if you intend to take responsibility for it. If there is a stray cat in your neighbourhood it is much kinder to take it to an animal shelter where it may find a new home. A life spent fighting and foraging for food is not a happy one.

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8. Be cat friendly

Make your home cat friendly. Cats are very intelligent animals and need some stimulation every day. They love games requiring great feats of athleticism and they love to pretend to hunt. You can purchase ready-made scratching poles and cat gyms from your local pet shop. Cats love to sleep undisturbed for long periods. They like to hide and also position themselves on a high vantage point in order to survey their kingdom. Provide beds, cubbies, perches and refuges for your cat. Give some thought to owning two cats, so they have company when you are at work.

9. Play safe

Never tease a cat or make them aggressive or fearful as they may scratch or bite someone. Encourage your children to play safely and teach them how to behave appropriately around cats.

10. Cats are clean freaks

Cats are naturally fastidious and prefer to dig a hole in which to toilet. This can be simulated indoors with a cat litter tray. Provide a litter tray in a private place in the house away from the feeding area. Remember to clean the litter tray everyday. For your own health, wear gloves when you handle the litter tray. If you have more than one cat you may need to provide more than one litter tray.

11. A healthy cat is a happy cat

Make sure your cat is healthy and free of fleas and worms. Take your cat to the vet at least once a year. Ask your vet how you can protect your cat from Cat Flu, Feline Enteritis and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (AIDS for cats). Not only will regular check-ups keep your cat healthy and happy, it also helps prevent your cat spreading diseases to other cats.