

American Cat Fanciers Association

How To Find The Kitten of Your Dreams

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Now that you have chosen your perfect breed, how do you find that perfect kitten who is meant to share your life?

You can always go to a pet shop that sells purebred kittens, but since professional cat breeders will not sell to pet stores, your best bet is to buy directly from a breeder. This assures you of knowing the person who bred the kitten, knowing about the parents of the kitten, having complete health information, and proper registration forms along with a true evaluation of the quality of the kitten in case you are interested in showing the kitten. Also, by buying from a breeder, you have someone you can call for advice or if you have questions.

One of the easiest ways to find a cat breeder is by checking the advertisements in Cat Fancy magazine. The breeders who advertise there are currently active in breeding their particular breed and usually have kittens that are available or will be available in a short time. Using the ads also enables you to choose a breeder who may be close to where you live so that you can pick up your kitten or, at least, minimize the distance the kitten will have to fly. If you contact a breeder who has no kittens for sale, be certain to ask for a referral to another breeder. Most breeders work with other breeders and we tend to know who has kittens available. If the breeder you have called can't give you a referral to another breeder, ask the breeder for the address of her breed society. Every breed of cat who is accepted for Championship status in the show ring has a breed society. This is a great source of names of breeders who specialize in the particular breed you are interested in. In addition, most breed societies have a written Code of Ethics which the breeders in the society must adhere to.

Professional breeders exhibit at cat shows in order to gain titles on the cats in their cattery so cat shows are also a great place to meet breeders. In fact, some breeders even have kittens for sale at the show. To find a cat show that you can attend, check the cat show listings in Cat Fancy. The listing will give you the name of a contact, usually the Entry Clerk, who can give you information on the show hours for spectators.

You can contact a breeder either in person, by letter or by telephone. Most breeders will spend plenty of time with you and answer all your questions. Breeders generally have a package of materials they can send to you along with photographs of some of the cats in their cattery. Just remember that a breeder's weekend may well be taken up with a cat show which may entail travel on Friday and Monday. If you want a breeder to have plenty of time to talk to you, the best time to call is during the week.

Even though you may want to get that special kitten as quickly as you can, you may find that you will have to wait. Some breeds of cat are still rare in this country with very few kittens born each year, so you may have to wait longer for a Japanese Bobtail, Devon Rex, or Korat than you would for a Persian, Himalayan, or Siamese. Also, responsible breeders rarely release a kitten to any home before the kitten is 4 months (16 weeks) old. This is for many reasons including the fact that it is not until that age that all of the inoculations your kitten needs will have been given. Also, if your kitten has to be shipped by air, most airlines will not ship a kitten younger than this. But the most important reason is that the process of adjusting to a new home, with new food, new water, a new place for the litter, and the like

is easier if you wait until the kitten is at least 4 months old.

When you first contact a breeder, you will find that you are being interviewed more than you are interviewing! You will be asked many questions about the way you live, your knowledge of cats in general and your understanding of the breed you are interested in specifically. You may be asked for references from your Veterinarian and you will most certainly be asked to sign a contract.

After the breeder interviews you, you must interview the breeder. You are entitled to know exactly how the kitten was raised because this information is very valuable to you. The most important thing you should find out is how your kitten was treated during its early life. Professional breeders follow the Veterinary literature and know that the ages between 2 to 7 weeks are critical in the future life and adjustment of a kitten. If a kitten is not handled during this period, it may not become fully socialized in the future. Be certain to ask the breeder about this. In addition, you will want to ask what kind of food the kitten is used to eating and what kind of litter is used in the cattery. This will enable you to make the adjustment from the cattery to your home an easy one for your kitten.

Of course, the best way to find out about the breeder and the cattery would be to visit and see both the cats and the breeder in the cattery environment. Most buyers consider that this is a great way to check on cleanliness and to watch the cats in action which gives you an indication of their personalities. However, a cattery visit is not always possible so don't rule out a cattery because the breeder does not permit visitors at that time. You must remember that if you already own cats, you are bringing your cat's germs into the cattery. If your cat has a cold, you may pass that cold onto the cattery cats. When a breeder has a pregnant Queen, or kittens who are too young to have been vaccinated, new germs being introduced into the cattery can cause a real health concern.

An alternative to a cattery visit would be to ask the breeder if their cattery is a "CFA Approved Cattery" or a "CFA Approved Cattery of Excellence". This is a relatively new program available to professional breeders. In order to qualify, your cattery must be inspected by a Veterinarian and pass a set of standards set up by the Cat Fanciers Association. These standards will not guarantee the health of any individual kitten, but they are an indication that the cattery meets the standards for cattery cleanliness and the proper care and treatment of cats living in a cattery.

In dealing with breeders, you should be aware of many terms that breeders use.

A "registered" kitten is a kitten which has had its birth accepted for registration with one or more of the associations which register cats. A registered kitten is not the same as a show kitten. Registration is not a guarantee of the kitten's health. It is only a guarantee of the kitten's breed and lineage. On the other hand, if a kitten is not registered, it is really not a "pure-bred". That is because without registration papers, you cannot be sure about the breed of its parents. That means if you see a "pure-bred" kitten for sale at a pet store, don't assume that it is registered. And, if you see a "registered" kitten at a pet store, please don't assume it is also a "show" kitten. So, from your point of view, buying a registered Siamese kitten means you have bought a pure-bred Siamese. It does not necessarily mean that the parents were show cats. It does mean, however, that the parents are also registered.

A "show quality" kitten is different from a registered kitten. A show kitten is one which is registered and which can be shown in competition. In addition, it will probably win titles or awards in competition.

In discussing the "quality" of a kitten you are interested in purchasing, you should also have

an understanding of the terms that breeders use. The most common terms you will hear from breeders when you are looking to buy a kitten are "show quality", "top show", and "pet". The key here is that, regardless of what anyone tells you, there is no "standard" definition of "show quality", or of any of the other terms often used by breeders to describe the quality of registered kittens. When you are looking at a breeder's kittens, ask what that particular breeder actually means by the terms the breeder uses.

So you can understand what these concepts can cover, let us explain the definitions our cattery uses in its contracts:

"Top Show" means that when a adult, the kitten is expected to be able to achieve a title of "Grand Champion";

"Show" means the same, but the title achieved would be that of "Champion";

"Pet Quality" means that, while the kitten is a pure-bred, the breeder believes that the kitten is not suitable for show competition against other pure-bred kittens for one or more reasons. These include matters such as color and color placement, relative size or perfection of physical features such as ears, tail, etc., and other subjective, cosmetic features, measured against the standards of perfection as adopted by a specified cat federation. Pet quality does not mean that the kitten is unhealthy, but merely that the breeder does not believe that it is suitable for showing as a championship kitten.

If you are interested in showing your kitten, even though the kitten is pet quality, there is still a place for you at most cat shows. If you want to show the kitten, take it to the Household Pet class and show it there. You can get rosettes, and, in some associations, you can even earn titles and awards. The rules on how you do this differ from association to association.

When looking at a kitten for purchase, check carefully for indications of good health. The coat should be glossy, not rough. The eyes should be bright, not weepy. The body weight should be in line with the breed - a Siamese kitten will look thinner than a Persian kitten. In general, the kitten should feel firm and not mushy.

Since cattery cats are socialized at an early age, the kitten should have an alert, friendly attitude and allow itself to be held. However, each kitten is individual and some are more outgoing than others. Don't neglect that sweet little kitten in the corner just because he is not as demonstrative as his littermate. Also, the attitude of kittens varies with their age. All kittens go through a stage where toys are much more fun than people. It seems that they start to develop their loving ways at about 3 1/2 months of age. If you see a kitten who is a little younger than that, check the kitten's attitude by playing with it using a toy.

As a general rule, we find boy kittens to be sweeter than girls. In fact, our best "mommy" is an altered male! Despite what you may hear, boys are easy to care for. Make certain the boy is neutered as soon as your Veterinarian feels is safe and ask your Vet to remove all testicular material. This will prevent any "spraying" in the future. If you choose a little girl, you will generally find the kitten to be a little smaller than the boy as well as a little more active. Again, have the kitten spayed as soon as possible. Studies have found that when a female is spayed before her first heat, her risk of developing breast cancer decreases dramatically.

Raising a kitten from the time it is born until the time it leaves the cattery at 4 months of age, assuming nothing ever goes wrong, costs approximately \$150-\$200. This includes the cost of the disposable equipment necessary for delivering the kittens, a contribution to the

cost of the permanent cattery equipment necessary for breeding kittens (such as caging, heating units, etc.) the food we use for weaning the kittens, kitten food after they are completely weaned, litter, inoculations, the cost of registering the litter so that the kittens can be registered, and a routine "well kitten" veterinary exam. This does not include the cost of the acquisition of the Queen and the Sire, their housing, feeding and health care. When you figure in the cost of stud service (if you are going outside the cattery), and the shows required to get a title on the cats you are breeding, the costs can become enormous. So when someone asks me why a purebred kitten costs \$400 and up, I'm always tempted to respond that I, too, am shocked that the cost is so little! If you are really interested in acquiring a Pet Quality purebred kitten, you should be prepared to spend anywhere from \$250 to \$1000 depending upon the rarity of the breed. If you are interested in a cat who is Show Quality or Top Show Quality, you must expect to spend much more. I am constantly amazed that people would not hesitate to spend this amount of money on a dog or a horse but are shocked to find that a kitten can cost this much.

When you do spend this much money for a kitten, you will be dealing with a professional breeder, one who is knowledgeable and continues to learn and study about Veterinary Science as well as about their breed. In dealing with a professional breeder, you can expect to receive at the time you take possession of your new kitten:

- a complete written shot record for the kitten;
- a copy of the cat's pedigree (probably not signed);
- and a set of papers permitting the kitten to be registered in one or more associations.

A common practice of breeders is to withhold the registration papers until you provide proof of neutering which will be given to you by your Veterinarian. When you get the registration papers, they will usually be "restricted", that is they will be marked so that you cannot breed this kitten, or that you can register it only as a Household Pet. The breeder does this to make sure that you do not "accidentally" breed the kitten and contribute to the population of non-pedigreed cats.

In addition, the breeder should give you a "health certificate". This is document, approved by the state in which the Vet practices, and signed by a Veterinarian stating that the kitten has been examined and appeared to be in good health at that time. Some breeders do not do this, and, instead, state in writing that the kitten is "in good health". Obviously, the Veterinary Health Certificate is a better protection for you. If you are willing to proceed without that, make sure that you let the breeder know that the new kitten will be seen by a vet within 48-72 hours from the time it gets home. You will also want a detailed medical history of your kitten as well as a list of inoculations given. Most professional breeders give their own vaccinations, but will give you a list of what was given and when it was administered. Take this record to your Veterinarian when you take your new kitten for his first visit and have your Vet make it a part of your kitten's medical records.

Depending on the cattery, you may get one or more of the following along with your kitten:

a "kitten" kit. This is a set of educational materials, sample foods, and coupons provided to the breeder by cat food companies, to introduce new kitten owners to their products;

a sales contract. This sets forth what you are required to do with the kitten and specifies what the breeder has promised you. The majority of breeders have had an Attorney write their contract for them. In some states, a contract may be required.

a medical insurance policy. Some breeders provide pre-paid insurance, covering major medical problems It is designed to provide the new owner of the kitten with additional

protection. These policies cost between \$40-\$50.

a set of written instructions on how to get your new kitten used to its new home, with information on the kinds of food it was fed, litter used, etc.

Despite the fact that the purchase of a purebred kitten may sound like a long, complicated process, it really is not. You must always keep in mind that each and every kitten born in a cattery is very precious to a breeder. We arranged and witnessed the breeding, worried over the mommy, delivered the kittens (usually at 3:00 a.m.) and then watched over them each and every day. We socialized them, loved them, and are always reluctant to let them leave the cattery. The breeder must feel that this kitten belongs with you and that you will care for it and love it all the days of its life. A breeder may let a kitten leave the cattery, but the kitten will never leave the breeder's heart.

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