

What Kind of Cat Should I Get?

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You might already have a particular breed of cat in mind. "Getting to Know Cats" and AnimalInfo Publication fact sheets will give you further information about the different breeds available and the care needed to look after them. However even if you have a good idea of what you want there are still some other factors to take into consideration.



Adult or kitten?

In part, this decision will depend on your situation. However if you're not sure yet and don't have your heart set on a kitten, consider the following reasons for selecting an adult:

- Many adult cats found in shelters have often come from a good stable home, but are relinquished after the death or illness of an owner.
- Older cats may already be trained to use a litter-box, and will be sterilised and have their first vaccinations already if they come from a reputable shelter.
- You can see what you are getting with an adult cat.
- You may not have the time required to devote to a little kitten, (extensive training), 3 - 4 meals a day etc.
- Shelters very rarely have trouble finding homes for kittens. The older cat however is more difficult to house. You can make a cat and its shelter worker very happy and give yourself that warm glow inside by doing a good deed!
- If you have small children, or dogs, an older cat with a known family history may adapt more easily and be more resilient to these family terrors than a kitten would.
- Kittens are adorable and a whole world of fun - but they do need a lot of time, work and attention and can be destructive. Keep in mind that the cute and fluffy stage only lasts a very short time.

Reasons for choosing a kitten over an adult may include:

- Guaranteeing that the kitten will bond easily with you and your family
- A strong desire to be part of the kittens growing process

Female or male?

Left un-sterilised, there are huge differences between male and female cats. Unneutered tom cats will roam, spray to mark their territories and fight other intruders to their property. Even if you keep them indoors you will have problems with spraying as it is a natural behaviour. Unneutered female cats will regularly come into season and become pregnant unless kept isolated from entire male cats. However if you do the right thing and sterilise them before 5 months of age there is little difference. I have found my male cats over the years have generally been a little bit sookier and cuddly than the females. But there are always individual variations. In the end this decision may not be important to you and you may choose your cat based on personality or other factors.

Long-haired or short-haired?

Many people love the look of long-haired cats but they do require a lot of work to keep in good condition. In hot climates the cats will do best if clipped for the summer. In any climate they will need constant brushing to ensure they do not develop matts in their fur. Once a long-haired cat's fur has become severely matted, often the only alternative is to sedate and clip the hair. Matted hair is not nice for the cat - it can become painful when the matts pull on the skin, it can inhibit full movement and can allow painful infections to develop under the skin. Long-haired cats will also shed a lot more hair in your house. If you can't cope with the above, get a short-haired cat. They will still require periodic grooming to minimise hair shed in your house but are a lot less work.

Purebred (Pedigree) or non- purebred (non- pedigree, moggie)?

There are over 35 recognised breeds of purebred cat available. The advantage of choosing a purebred is that their size, temperament and appearance is quite predictable. This may help with choosing a cat that will fit in with your personality and lifestyle. You may have already fallen in love with a particular breed of cat. If so are you aware of any health problems that breed may be prone to? Another advantage of buying a pedigree cat from a reputable breeder is that they will have made every effort to breed out genetic problems.

'Moggies' is a term derived from the English for domestic cats with mixed parentage. They are also often referred to as 'household cats'. There are typical colorations of moggies which include - tabby, ginger, tortoiseshell, calico (tortoiseshell with white patches), black, black and white etc. I must admit I have a weakness for ginger moggies which stems from my childhood. I have also found tabby cats to have very individual, vibrant personalities. Again you may have a strong preference for a particular 'type' of moggie. Or you may just fall in love and have the choice made for you! One advantage of buying a non-purebred moggie is easy availability and cost. A disadvantage is predictability of temperament. As mentioned above, purebreds generally have predictable temperaments. However some of the 'rules' applying to purebred temperament can be used to help you predict a moggie's personality. For example heavy bodied, 'cobby' cats tend to more laid back and less hyperactive. Whereas the long-legged oriental type cats tend to be more vocal, active and inquisitive.

Whatever your decision might be, make sure you do your homework on the cat or breed you are thinking of getting.

Rescue shelters have more than enough unwanted cats and if people took more care in their choice of cat and their responsibilities as cat owners, perhaps they would have fewer cats to care for, re-home or otherwise dispose of.