

10 Tips for Bringing a New Kitten Home

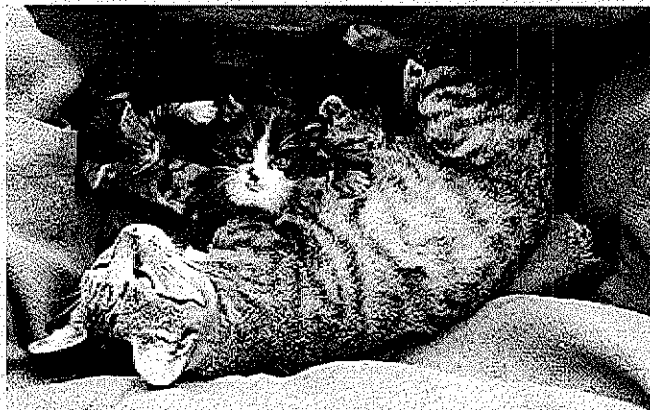
Bringing a cuddly, appealing bundle of purr home is exciting, whether the kitten is your first or an addition to your current pet family. Your kitten will be entirely reliant on you to ease his transition from mom cat's side or animal shelter to this strange new place. Keeping him safe and happy takes planning and patience for everyone in the household. The efforts will pay off, as your new little friend grows into a confident, affectionate kitty who knows there's no place like home. Here are 10 tips for making your new friend's arrival easier.



The more love and care you give your pets, the happier and healthier they'll be!

10: Give It Time

Kittens are sometimes adopted at six weeks of age, but 10 to 12 weeks is better. Those extra weeks spent with his mother and siblings help a kitten learn acceptable behavior, from getting along with siblings to getting used to human contact. A six- or seven-week-old kitten may be stressed and confused at being separated from his or her family too soon; your kitten may be fearful of people, and could try to hide or run away from interaction. If a kitten has been gently handled and has gotten used to humans, he will be friendlier and better adjusted. In choosing a kitten, look for one that is inquisitive, doesn't shy away from your touch, and is ready to play.



Give your new friend time to spend with its mother and siblings before you take it home.

9: Provide All the Comforts

Kittens are growth machines for their first year and need different nutrition than adult cats. Extra protein for muscle and tissue development, fat for fatty acids and plenty of calories are key to kittens'

health. Specially formulated kitten foods fitting their nutritional requirements should be given until the kitten is a year old.

Away from his littermates or mother, the kitten needs to feel secure as well as warm. Whether you provide a cardboard box lined with a blanket or a fancier bed from a pet supply store, keep your kitten's bed in a quiet place, away from household traffic.

Litter training is easy -- cats instinctively bury their waste -- but takes patience. Put the litter box in a corner or other secluded spot. After your kitten has awakened from a nap, or shortly after she's finished eating, place her in the box. If she doesn't dig or scratch, gently take one of her front paws and simulate digging with it. Praise her if she uses the box, but never punish her if he doesn't. Just place her in it at hourly intervals until she gets the idea.

To discourage clawing furniture, provide a carpet-covered scratching post.



Make your kitten's new home warm and cozy.

8: Help Him Meet the Family

Although everyone will want to hold the kitten, limit handling for the first few days while your new pet adjusts. Set up his bed, litter box and food in a quiet room where he can be secured until he gets to know his new home. Introduce one family member at a time, allowing the kitten to come to you and learn your touch.

Children under five should not interact with kittens; many shelters and rescue groups will not allow families with very young children to adopt kittens because children can be rough, sometimes tragically, with kittens. Older children can be shown how to hold a cat -- with one hand just behind the front legs, the other supporting his hindquarters. They should be taught never to grab a kitten's tail or ears, or pick it up by its scruff. Show children how to gently pet a cat's head and back. Remind them to always wash their hands after being around kitty. Always supervise children's interaction with kittens, especially if they have friends visiting.



Kittens need a little extra time to adjust to a new family.

7: Kitten-proof Your Home

Kittens can get tangled or choked by anything swinging or hanging. Therefore, keep your new pet safe by securely anchoring drape or blind cords out of reach.

To prevent chewing on electric and phone cords, bundle them with a cord manager and fasten away from kittens' reach.

Rubber bands, jewelry, Christmas decorations, balloons and other small items are dangerous to kittens that may swallow them. Remove poisonous plants, and roach or ant traps and make sure the toilet lid is down. Keep kitchen and bathroom cabinets closed so your kitten doesn't encounter bleach, detergent, dental floss and other household items when exploring.

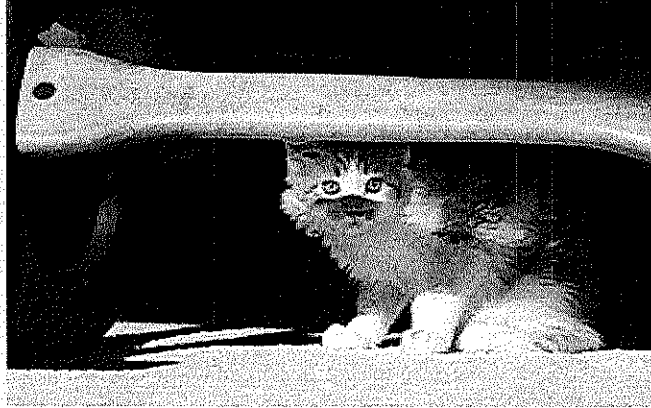
In the laundry area, keep washer and dryer doors closed: A kitten may climb into a warm dryer for a nap. Remember, if something would be harmful for a toddler, it's the same for your kitten.



Take time to kitten-proof your home.

6: Make a Room-by-Room Introduction

After you've kitten-proofed, introduce your kitten to your home one room at a time. Place his open carrier in whichever room you are introducing him to so he has a retreat if he wants it, and let him walk around while you sit quietly. Talk to him softly as he explores. He may hide under a bed or scoot behind a refrigerator, so you need to be vigilant. If you don't want him in the habit of climbing on your bed, gently remove him and place him on the floor. Bring him back to his own space, and repeat this introduction process in each room of your home until he has explored everywhere.



Make sure your kitten is familiar with all its surroundings.

5: Help Him Adapt to Other Pets (and Vice Versa)

Before bringing in a new kitten, be sure your resident pets have recently been checked by your vet, and are disease-free. When the kitten is in his or her secured room, your other cat will sniff around the doorway. Give your resident cat extra attention to ease his or her anxiety. Once the kitten feels comfortable, allow the two to meet briefly. Stay in the room while they sniff and explore each other. There may be some hissing and growling. If one cat shows real hostility, separate them and try again a few days later.

Never leave a dog alone with a new kitten. Dogs can become aggressive, or a kitten may claw at a dog's face. Make sure your dog is properly leashed as you introduce him or her to your kitten following the same procedure you would to introduce a cat to your kitten. This lets the animals learn each other's scent. The kitten should not be allowed to run away because the dog may think chasing it is a game. Reward both pets for calm behavior. Always supervise their interactions until the kitten is fully grown.



Give your pets time to get acquainted.

4: Keep Her Playtime Safe

A kitten's high energy level makes her eager to play at any time. To keep her safe, choose toys carefully, just as you would for a child. Avoid those with buttons, bells or other small parts that can come off and be swallowed. Watch for sharp edges, and beware of string, yarn or ribbon, as these are dangerous if ingested.

If a toy has any of these, always supervise the kitten when she plays with it. Small stuffed animals to attack and a ball too large to fit into her mouth will provide hours of kitten fun. You can hold a plastic fishing pole, anchored by a secure line to a fuzzy mouse or other small toy, in front of the kitten who will delight in chasing this prey.

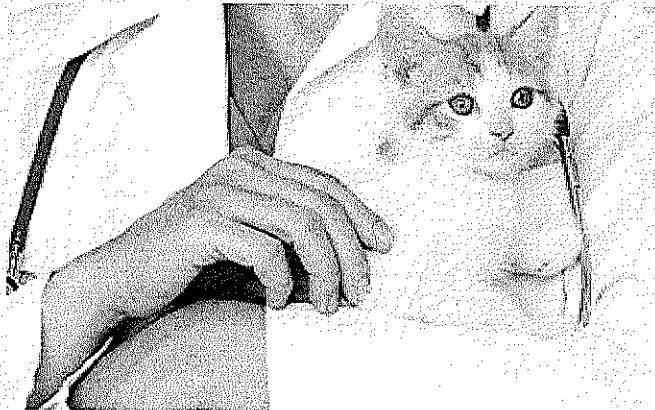


Choose toys carefully.

3: Have a Vet Check Him Out

Your vet should see your kitten within a day or two of his arrival. She'll check for ear mites and fleas, and examine a fecal sample, because most kittens have some form of worms. Many vets routinely deworm all kittens with an oral medication. At six to seven weeks, your kitten should receive a "three-way" vaccine that protects against the respiratory diseases FVR (feline viral rhinotracheitis) and FCV (feline calicivirus), as well as distemper (feline panleukopenia), with a booster shot given 12 to 14 weeks later. If your kitten is at least nine to 10 weeks old, he'll be tested for FeLV (feline leukemia) and FIV (feline immunodeficiency virus). He can get a rabies shot, usually required by law, at 12 weeks of age.

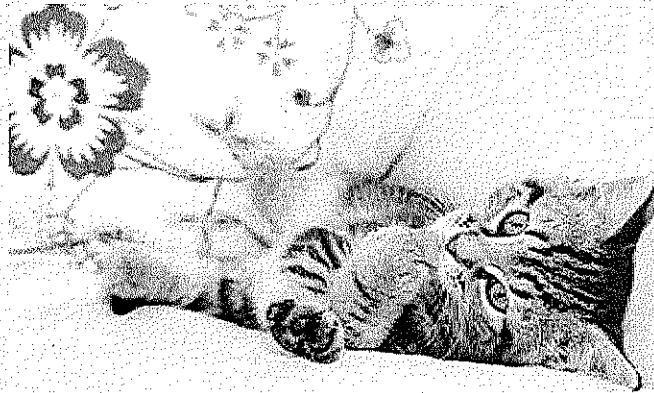
Kittens can be spayed or neutered as early as eight weeks of age, but your vet can determine the best time for this surgery. Spaying protects your female kitten from the risk of mammary, uterine and ovarian cancers, and spares her the stresses of pregnancy. Neutering a male reduces his risk of prostate cancer, and he won't "spray" to mark his territory. Because the urine of intact males literally stinks, neutering your kitten will make the litter box cleanup less of a chore. Spaying or neutering also helps reduce the problem of cat overpopulation.



Be sure your pet visits the vet as often as necessary.

2: Make Home Alone Time Fun

A kitten left home alone should be secured in one room with his bed, litter box, scratching post, food and water. If you'll be gone until evening, add a nightlight. Give him enough safe toys to keep him busy, such as a trackball toy. Place a radio just outside his door, turned to a classical music or country western station. Many pet sitters have found cats seem to prefer these two genres. Other cats like listening to talk shows, perhaps soothed by the human voice. If your kitten will always be alone during the day, spend extra time petting and playing with him when you return.



When you're away, make sure your kitten is safe - not bored.

1: Banish the Single-Kitten Blues

When you first bring your kitten home, he may miss his siblings and mother. He'll meow in confusion or wake up during the night. Ease his stress by picking him up, stroking him while speaking in a soothing tone. Wrapping a ticking clock in a towel and placing it near his bed to remind him of his mother's heartbeat.

Kittens have so much energy, they need to stay active to be happy. If you bring home two kittens together rather than one, they'll focus their play-fighting, scratching and wrestling on each other, and are less likely to feel lonely. They are also a lot more fun to watch.

