

Domestic cat

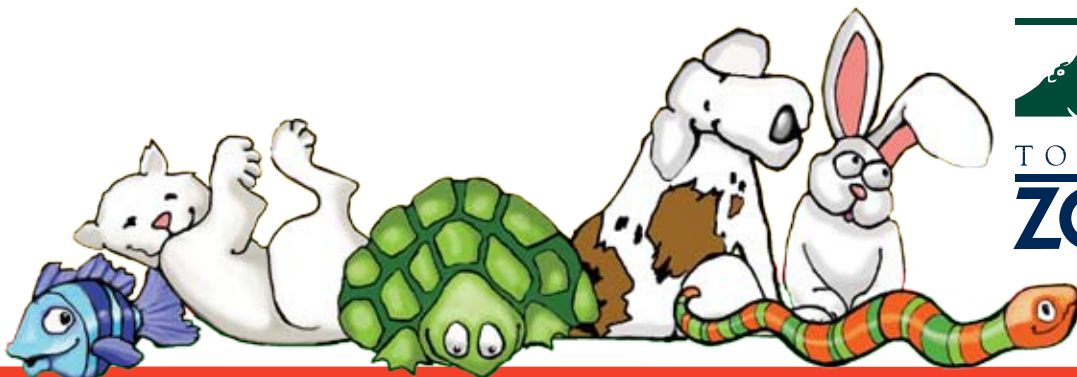
(*Felis catus*)



Before deciding if a domestic cat is the right animal for you, ask yourself the following questions.

- Have you researched this animal?
- Do you have the time, money and knowledge to provide proper care for the animal's entire lifespan?
- Do you have the appropriate location and space for this animal?
- How can I keep this animal legally?
- Is there a mature person in the household to provide primary care of the animal?
- Do you have a vet in your area that is able to provide appropriate medical care to this specific animal?

If you have answered yes to these questions or need some extra help, then let The Toledo Zoo give you some great information on your animal of choice. Although this animal may be right for you, please read below and discover some of the important needs of this animal.





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Basics

Short, tall or grande?

Cats can make purr-fect pets for the right owner.

Just like with dogs, there are several different breeds of cat. Some breeds, such as a Maine Coon, can be very large and weigh up to 25 pounds. Other smaller breeds will weigh much less. A domestic or basic house cat can weigh anywhere between 6 to 16 pounds. Cats are typically 9-10 inches tall and have long tails that are about one foot in length. When touching your cat, you should notice that you can kind of feel some of its bones under its skin but the bones should not be jutting out. That's how you can tell if your cat is a healthy weight or not.

Cats can have both long and short hair.

One type of cat, called a Sphinx, doesn't have any hair at all! Cats also can come in all different colors such as black, white, grey brown and orange. Some cats are one color or could be a combination of all colors, and colors could be striped or patchy. Just be sure to look for an animal with a shiny, healthy coat with no missing patches of fur.

My, what big eyes you have!

Cats have big round eyes on the front of their face. Their eyes can even be different colors just like people, such as yellow, gold, or even green. You may also notice their eyes look a little different than ours. Humans are most active during the day (diurnal) so our eyes work best during the day. Cats are most active at night (nocturnal) and dawn/dusk (crepuscular) so their eyes work well in extremely low light. When there isn't very much light outside, you will notice the cat's eyes (pupils) look huge and circular; this helps them to see better in the dark. However, the cats still need to be able to see during the daytime; when there is a lot of sunlight their eyes, the pupils will contract to little slits to help them see when it is bright out. Some gem stones and marbles get the name "cat's eyes" from the crescent shape in a real cat's eye.

Say Cheese!

Cats have 30 permanent teeth as an adult. Kittens start out with 26 teeth, but just like you, they lose their teeth when their adult teeth start to grow. These teeth are sharp because cats are hunters and like to eat meat. Sometimes, when you play with your pet cat, they may play bite (like they do in the wild), which can hurt because of those sharp teeth. When picking out a cat for yourself, try to play with them to find one that doesn't tend to play bite.

Claws?

Cats have four paws, and since they are hunters, they have five nails or claws on all of their paws. But cat claws are special because they can pull their claws into their feet (retract) when they are not using them. You can't pull your nails back into your hand when you want, can you? Most other animals can't either!

How long is that in kitty years???

A cat that is well cared for can live 15-20 years. Some cats have been recorded to live into their 30s! When deciding that you want a cat as a pet, think about how old you will be in 20 years and what you will be doing. Can you see yourself taking care of a cat for 20 years? If so, a kitty companion may be the right pet for you!



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Personalities are not just for people.

Every cat has its own "personality.". Some cats will be shy and might hide a lot whereas others may be more outgoing and will want to play with you all the time! If your cat is shy, you might scare it if you try to play with it too much or too rough at first. You need to let the cat decide when he or she wants to play and for how long. Soon, your cat will learn to have fun with you and will want to be around you more often. If you give your cat some of its favorite toys or treats, he or she will come looking for you because it will learn that you are fun and safe to be around.

Wait, did that kitty just say something?! They will often meow when they want something such as food or toys. They sometimes even make little chirping noises if they see birds outside a window because they just get so excited! You may even hear or feel your cat purr deep inside its chest when you are petting it. This lets you know that your cat is happy and enjoying the "mas-sage." When cats are babies they will purr to let their mommy know they are safe and happy. Cats are also able to growl when they are angry, just like their larger cat relatives found at the zoo!



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What do i need to survive?

Stop... Dinner time!

What goes best with dinner? A fresh bowl of water, of course! Fresh clean water, in a bowl where your cat can reach it, is important. The bowl can get dirty quickly, so you will need to change the water every day and wash the bowl daily, just like you do with your own dishes.

What's for dinner? Cats are strict carnivores, which means they only eat meat. The staple of a cat's diet should be a dry kibble that can be found at any pet store. It is important to read the label when choosing a type of food for your cat. You want to make sure that the first ingredient is a meat-based protein and not a "meat by-product". This meat protein can be from beef, fish, or poultry (like chicken). Sometimes there are other "fillers" listed on the label, such as rice or oatmeal, but since cats do not eat carbohydrates try to avoid food items with large amounts of these ingredients.

What if you had to eat a peanut butter and jelly sandwich every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner? Even though this may be your favorite sandwich, would you want it to be the only thing you ever eat? Your cat might get bored eating the same thing everyday. To help prevent boredom, you may want to include some canned cat food in your cat's diet on occasion; this can sometimes help with digestion as well as add variety to your cat's cuisine. Make sure that you choose a high quality canned food. You can also offer store bought cat treats for variety.

At the Zoo, our cats receive dry cat food every day. One day per week, they each receive one tablespoon of canned cat food as well. The amount of cat food you offer to your cat per day will vary depending on its age, weight, and size. It is always helpful to discuss diet with your vet and refer to the label on the cat food for recommended amounts. The type and amount of food to offer will also vary throughout the cat's life depending on if your cat needs to lose, gain, or maintain its current weight.

Avoid feeding these food items!

- Milk (believe it or not, they can't digest it!)
- Raw eggs or meat
- Candy like chocolate or other people treats
- Grapes or raisins
- Treats made for other animals like dogs

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A healthy pet is a happy pet.

Just like us, our pets can get sick and need to go to the doctor. Before bringing any pet home it is best to make a couple of phone calls to different veterinarians. It is good to be sure there is someone in your area that could care for a cat if sickness or injury occurs.

Here is a list of some signs your cat could be sick:

- Runny nose excessive sneezing
- Dull-looking eyes and/or excessive discharge from eyes
- Wheezing or difficulty breathing
- Loss of appetite, energy, and/or weight
- Hair loss
- Abnormal feces
- Abnormal behavior (no longer drinking as often, etc.)
- Limping
- Limp or crooked tail

Remember, a good veterinarian will be happy to talk about your animal's health, so don't hesitate to call if something seems wrong. Be aware that your new pet may need to have check-ups and even some shots every year. Be sure to keep in regular contact with your veterinarian so that you don't miss these important appointments!

Beauty School

While a cat will never need to go shopping for new clothes or shoes, there are a couple of things that will keep your cat looking good and feeling great! Brushing your cat will keep it clean and untangled and this is especially important for long-haired cats. This will also help avoid getting hairballs in their tummy, which could make them sick. Start brushing slow and easy until your pet gets comfortable and learns to enjoy the extra care (if it doesn't already like it). This can be great bonding time for you and your new friend. A long-haired cat may also need to be checked for knots in its hair. If you find any knots, you can simply take pair of scissors and, very carefully, cut out the knot.

Bath time! You will notice that your cat will give itself baths by using its tongue. If you have ever been licked by a cat, you may have noticed that the tongue is very rough and feels like sandpaper. The roughness acts like the bristles of a brush to keep your cat's coat nice and clean. You should not have to bathe your cat unless it gets extra dirty by playing in something yucky. Just be very careful and very gentle if you do have to bathe your cat because it is most likely not going to enjoy the bath.

The toenails can sometimes get too long so a little trim can do wonders for your cat. Your vet or local pet groomer can do this for you or you can have a professional show you how to do it at home (never try this yourself until you have been taught how to do it properly). Small animal nail trimmers can be found at any pet store if you do choose to trim the nails yourself. Be very careful when trimming nails! Inside the toenails is something called a quick or a small blood vessel with an active blood supply. Don't cut the nail back too far or the quick will bleed and could cause pain and even lead to infection. If you do accidentally cut it too far put something on to stop the bleeding such something called Kwik Stop (found at a pet store) or just use corn starch. If the bleeding will not stop, seek medical attention. Many times the blood vessel is slightly visible in clear nails, but otherwise taking the tip off and staying away from the toe and fur is best practice.

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Could I have some space please?

The most responsible way to house your cat is inside the house at all times! A cat that lives or visits the outdoors tends to hunt and kill other small native animals like song birds, frogs, toads and even bunnies. By keeping your cat inside, it won't be able to harm other animals and you will have better control over what they are eating. When your cat goes outside, it can also encounter other animals that could give your pet a disease or get into a fight (which may result in injury or death). To keep your cat entertained inside, it is best to provide lots of things for your cat to do in the house. The cat will also enjoy simply looking out the window!

Cats love to play with all sorts of things. They are very curious and will probably climb all over your furniture, hide in your cupboards and under your bed! Cats also like to scratch their claws on all kinds of things so you should provide your cat with items such as climbing structures and scratching posts so that it is not ripping your mom's favorite sofa. You may also want to give your cat some toys that you and your cat can play with together. Check out your local pet store for ideas. Cats will even play with things like cardboard boxes, balls of paper, string and feathers. Make sure all of the toys are safe for your cat! Make sure it can't hurt itself, get tangled in or choke on any of the things you give it.

Clean up time! Now that you have a living, eating, pooping kitty cat, it's time to clean up after it. You will need to provide it with a litter box with plenty of litter for your cat to go to the bathroom in. Usually, cats like spots in your house that are isolated and quiet to use for a bathroom. They will most likely not want to go where they sleep and play. The soiled litter should be scooped out every day and completely emptied and cleaned every week. You may have to clean it more often depending on how many cats you have. If the litter box gets too dirty, your cat may not want to use it, so keep an eye on it. This not only keeps your animal healthy, but saves you from a smelly house. You may need to train your kitten to use the litter box if it doesn't already know how to use one. Show the cat where the litter box location is and reward your pet for using it properly!



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How am i going to affect you?

How much is that kitty in the window? Meow! Meow!

There are many places you can get a cat, but some are better than others. Many animal rescues and shelters have lots of cats ready for adoption. These places find homeless kitties a new family. Check the animal for signs of good health, and stay away from places that don't properly care for their animals.

From all of the information above, you can see it takes a lot to prepare for a pet cat. If you choose to adopt a cat from a rescue, you could pay an adoption fee of \$0-\$100. This fee may cover any vet care the animal needed while living at the shelter. If you choose to buy a cat from a breeder, the price can vary depending on the breeder and the breed of cat. You will need to purchase toys, climbing structures, dishes, collar, litter box, litter, food, medication and don't forget vet bills (which can be pricey). It is good to look at your local pet store and online to price everything you'll need for pet care before you bring home your cat. Check with some vets in your area for their rates including office visit fees and routine procedures before purchasing your cat.

Risks and benefits to owning your animal.

Risks:

Cats make very good companion animals and there are not many risks to you as the keeper. However, anything with a mouth can bite. It is very rare for a cat to bite, but if the cat is excited or irritated, it may try to nip. You want your cat to know that you are safe and fun! If your cat is irritated or stressed, try leaving the animal alone for a little while to settle down before you attempt to interact with it. This will set you and your cat up to succeed.

Some cats may be shy and possibly won't want to interact with other animals you may have in your house. Other cats and dogs could be conceived as a danger and stress out your new friend, so you may need to evaluate the cat's behavior to decide if it would get along with your other pets before taking the cat home. Always be mindful of your new pet's surroundings.

If you don't provide your kitty with plenty of things to play with, climb on and scratch, you could end up with some of your furniture getting torn apart. You will need to teach your cat what things are okay for it to play with and scratch, and what things it is not allowed to play with.

Benefits:

Cats are cute, playful, fun pets that allow people to care for and learn about nature and responsible pet care. Countless studies have shown that pet ownership lowers anxiety, stress levels, and even blood pressure! Their companionship in exchange for your care can teach wonderful lessons and enrich life. Some people even believe pets can lead to longer life!

Laws... Who let the kitties out?

All animals are protected against cruelty by law so make sure you are able to take care of your cat and can keep it happy and healthy. Currently, there are no other specific laws about owning cats. If you rent your home, though, be sure to check with your landlord before bringing home a new pet.

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Our "together" time

Time flies when you are having fun with your new pet!

Interacting with your pet is an important and fun thing to do, so let's talk about proper holding and interaction. A calm animal is a happy animal, and a happy animal will be a wonderful pet.

Your cat may not like to be held because some don't like to be restrained. However, your cat will probably love to be pet by you. Try scratching behind its ears and under the chin. You can also pet gently down your cat's back. Be careful around the tail. It is full of small bones so and the cat may not like it to be touched (if you do touch, just be gentle).

Never chase your pet and make sure you calmly offer rewards (like a favorite treat) when your cat is doing something favorable, then your cat will learn to be excited to see you. Building a friendship with your animal may take a little time, so take a moment everyday to remind your pet that you are a good person to be around.

Kitty boot camp and training with treats.

Training and treats are great tools for any pet owner. First, determine a reward or treat that really makes your pet interested and motivated. The more the cat wants your "reward," the more your pet will do to get it.

Here are some possible rewards:

- Small amounts of wet canned food
- Store-bought cat treats
- Dried catnip
- A favorite toy
- Attention from you!

Small amounts of treats can go a long way, so only use the smallest amount that will still motivate your animal. Now that we have some treats, you can start training. The best way to train is with positive reinforcement and baby steps. Think of what you want your pet to do and then make a plan to get your animal to do it. Reward with a treat when your pet makes steps in the right direction. The animal will continue to figure out the behavior.

Some cats are very smart and will want to work for you while others may not be interested. If your cat does not seem very interested in training, you can still work with your cat but keep the training sessions short. This way your cat won't get frustrated.

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Keep 'em busy (and out of trouble)!

What does your animal do when you are not around? It will get into anything it can find and sometimes cause trouble. Just like people get bored, animals can get bored without something to do. Giving your animal fun things to do is an important job for pet owners. Since animals can't go out and buy new toys, they will often use whatever is around. This could mean chewing the wrong things, trying to get out of their housing to explore or worse. Giving animals enriching times or "enrichment" will keep them busy and happy.

Here are some great cat enrichment ideas:

- Cardboard boxes
- Blankets
- Training activities
- Other pets for company (if they are all comfortable with each other)
- Fun store-bought cat toys
- Time spent playing with you!

Change up the enrichment regularly to keep your pet's home new and exciting!



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Excellent! You have read over the basics of domestic cat pet ownership and care.

If you have determined that this type of pet is not the one for you, you may wish to consider volunteering at The Toledo Zoo, your local humane society/animal shelter, vet, animal rehabilitation facility or other animal caretaking establishment in order to interact with animals and learn more about which ones could make a good pet for you.

Learn More About Cats

At your local library:

The Usborne First Book of Pets and Petcare by Rose Hill

- A fully illustrated children's book that advises on the proper care of cats, dogs, and other small household pets.

On the web:

<http://www.peteducation.com>

- This site provides expert information for all types of pets from Doctors Foster and Smith.

<http://animaldiversity.ummz.umich.edu/site/index.html>

- Excellent source or animal information of all kinds

