

Buying a kitten - How to be an informed consumer

By Barbara Brown

First – stay away from kitten mills! Kitten mills and backyard breeders are those folks who breed purebred kittens and have them available year around because they breed their females multiple times per year. They show little interest in providing socialization, good nutrition, or adequate medical care for either the mother cat or the kittens. Their breeding cats and kittens are often maintained in squalid conditions they do not want you to see. They sell their kittens to pet stores, distributors/brokers, over the internet, or through local advertising. **They are only interested in making money.**



There are a small group of cat breeders who should be differentiated from kitten mills; they are **hobby breeders**. A **hobby breeder** is someone with purebred cats who periodically will have a litter with the hope that at least one of the kittens will be exemplary of the breed and can be shown in cat shows. The other kittens in the litter, those that are not worthy candidates for show, are sold. The hobby breeder may advertise the availability of their kittens through classified ads and through breed organizations or veterinarians. But, before you buy a kitten from a hobby breeder, you need to do your research and ask a lot of questions. If the breeder does not have satisfactory answers, go to someone else.

What to expect from a reputable hobby breeder:

1. You can visit the kittens in their home to see their living conditions.
2. You can see the kitten's parents. Although an exhausted mother cat is not unusual when raising young kittens (just like human parents with an infant that gives them little time for sleep), the mother cat should appear generally healthy.
3. The cats should have a separate area that is clean and protected.
4. Kittens should be 12 – 16 weeks old before becoming available for adoption.
5. Ask to see veterinary records for both the mother and kittens. A genuine hobbyist will have provided appropriate medical care.
6. At 9 to 10 weeks, the kitten should have had a veterinary checkup and received the "3-way vaccine," which contains agents against feline calicivirus, herpesvirus and feline panleukopenia (FRCP). Expect to see these records not just receive assurances that the kitten has had his or her shots.
7. Kittens will need to return to the vet at 12 to 14 weeks for a booster shot, and for a Rabies vaccine, if required by law in your area.
8. Spay and neutering - there have been numerous studies showing that healthy kittens can be spayed or neutered as young as six weeks of age and do quite well. The recovery of such young kittens is very quick and no negative significant concerns have been found. If the kitten has not been spayed or neutered, expect the breeder to require your assurance that this will be done –in writing.
9. Responsible breeders sell their kittens on contracts that typically include a health guarantee and refund policy
10. A responsible breeder should ask you lots of questions to assure themselves that the kitten is going to a good home.

11. Hobby breeders often belong to breed organizations, have shown their cats, and can discuss the breed's potential genetic and health issues. They actively screen their cats for genetic or hereditary diseases. Ask.
12. Ask questions about socialization (at least 20 minutes per day) and expect the breeder to recognize and know the characteristics of individual kittens.
13. A hobby breeder will not charge extra to get papers on the kitten.
14. A hobby breeder knows how other kittens they have bred are doing in their adoptive homes.
15. A hobby breeder will ask you for references

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