Adopting a Cat?
MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICE!

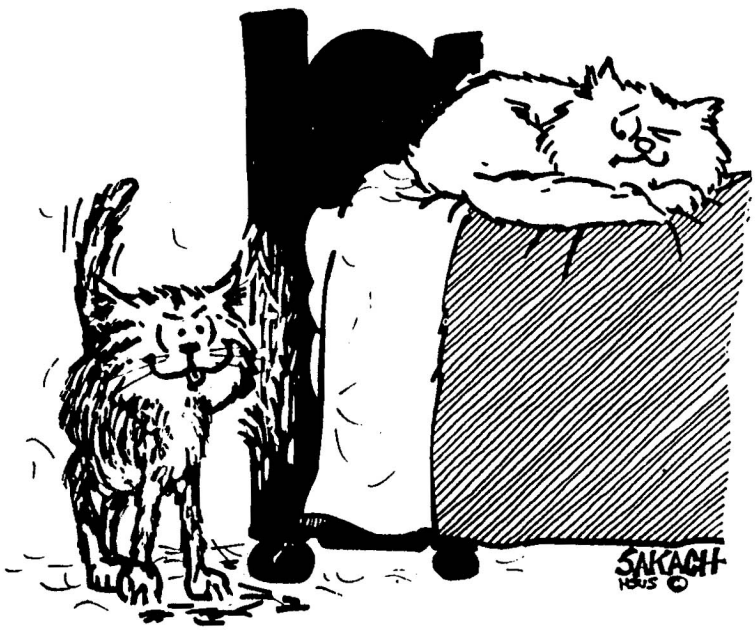
You may have heard the saying, "You own a dog, you feed a cat." It's true that cats value their independence a bit more than their canine counterparts. But if you've ever been around cats before, you already know they actually crave and require love and companionship.

Cats make wonderful pets. Because they're less demanding, they can easily adjust to a variety of lifestyles and living spaces. Every cat is a true individual, though, so it's important to take the time to choose a four-footed friend who's right for you. A cat's personality, age, and appearance, as well as the kinds of pets you already have at home, are all things you should keep in mind when making your selection:

Choose a Personality. Stroll past a few cat cages at the shelter, and you'll notice that some cats meow for special attention, while others simply lie back and gaze at you with an air of arrogance. There are as many different personalities of cats as there are cats in the shelter. Which disposition is best for you? *You* have to decide.

But regardless of individual personality, look for a cat who's playful, active, alert, and comfortable while being held and stroked. At the shelter, ask an adoption counselor for assistance when you wish to spend some time with individual cats.

Kitten or Cat? As a general rule, kittens are curious, playful, and full of energy, while adult cats are more relaxed and less mischievous. Kittens also require more time to train and feed. Cats are only kittens for a few months, though, so the age of the cat you adopt should really depend on the level of maturity you're looking for. Young children usually don't have the maturity to handle kittens responsibly, so a cat who's at least four months old is probably the best choice for homes with kids under six years old.



Short-haired or Long? Cats can have long, fluffy coats or short, dense fur, and the choice between the two is chiefly a matter of preference and availability. You'll see more short-haired cats at the shelter since they're the most popular and common cats. One thing to keep in mind is that long-haired cats require frequent grooming to be mat-free. Felines with short coats also require brushing, though less frequently, and they'll leave less hair on your favorite recliner. Most cats enjoy a regular brushing and will look forward to this daily ritual with you.

Room For One More

Other than those few considerations, selecting the right feline companion for you is really just a matter of meeting the cats at the shelter yourself.

If you already own a cat or dog, you're probably wondering how easy it is to add a cat to the family. The good news is that cats can get along with other cats and—despite the common stereotype—most dogs can get along with cats. The bad news is, introducing a new cat to a home with other pets will require some patience on your part.

The best way to handle adding a new cat to the home is to provide time for a period of adjustment. You can do this effectively by isolating your new feline in a room of his own for a while—something that's a good idea for a new cat anyway.

After several days, supervise meetings between the animals for periods of increasing length. Most cats will soon learn to accept each other, and some may quite possibly become the best of buddies. Some dogs simply won't tolerate the presence of a cat, but by carefully introducing them, most problems can be solved.

Be Responsible!

Regardless of the cat you choose, you'll want to start being a responsible pet owner right away. The easiest way to do that is to keep your cat indoors with you from the very beginning. If you don't let your new friend outside, he'll never miss it, and will have a much better chance of still being around to sit on your lap a few years from now.

The other big staple of responsible cat ownership is having your female cat spayed or your male cat neutered. Spaying or neutering will ensure that your cat never adds to the millions of animals born each year who never find a good home. It'll also help him or her live a longer, healthier life.

Adopt a Cat for Life

Finally, remember that you're making a commitment to love and care for your new pet for his or her lifetime—which could mean 10, 15, even 20 years. So choose your new pal carefully and be a responsible pet owner. In no time at all, you'll know how wonderful sharing your home with a cat can be.

Provided by The Humane Society of the United States.