BE A RESPONSIBLE CAT OWNER!

You're probably thinking, "How hard can it be? Cats can take care of themselves." But think again. Living with a cat may not involve much work, but it doesn't mean a total hands-off policy, either.

Being a responsible cat owner can be as simple as keeping your cat indoors, providing him with companionship, having her or him spayed or neutered, keeping a collar and ID tag on the cat, and meeting his basic needs of food, water, and veterinary care.

Keep Your Cat Indoors

When most people hear the words "animal nuisance," they tend to think of dogs. But cats are often just as bad. When allowed to roam, they can get into garbage cans, defecate in flower beds and sandboxes, cause traffic accidents, and contribute to pet overpopulation. In addition, they can have a devastating effect on local wildlife—killing dozens, even hundreds, of songbirds and small mammals every year.

Of course, the most important reason to keep your cat inside is for his own safety. Unlike dogs, cats don't need much space to exercise and a litter box will meet those "other" needs just fine. In other words, cats don't *need* to go out and face disease, cat fights, dog fights, poisons, parasites, cruel people, and the biggest cat-killer of all, traffic.

Cats who live indoors from the start will never have the urge to roam around outside. Even cats who've previously been indoor/outdoor pets can be trained to accept being inside *all* the time.

Keeping cats happy inside is simply a matter of creating a healthy and stimulating indoor environment. Some good ideas are giving your cat toys that feel furry or feathery or have catnip inside, providing him with a scratching post at least two feet high, planting pots of indoor greens for him to chew on, adopting another animal to keep him company, and, most importantly, playing games and spending time with your companion.

If cats have their owners' love and attention and lots to do inside, they won't miss the great outdoors, which, after close examination, isn't so great for cats after all.

A One-time Surgery, A Lifetime Benefit

"Spaying" and "neutering" are words you're probably familiar with. What you may not know is that these procedures are the most essential part of being a responsible pet owner.

To spay your female cat is to have her ovaries and uterus surgically removed. To neuter your male cat is to have his testicles removed. The result of both operations is that your pet will no longer be able to bring more homeless animals into the world. That's significant indeed when you consider the fact that nearly eight million dogs and cats have to be humanely destroyed each year for lack of good homes.

Spaying and neutering are also better for your pet. Spaying eliminates the possibility of uterine or ovarian cancer and greatly reduces the incidence of breast cancer, particularly when your cat is spayed before her first estrous cycle. Neutering reduces the incidence of prostate cancer and prostate disorders. Neutered cats are also less likely to spray and mark territory, and spayed cats will no longer go through annoying heat cycles. To top it all off, in addition to living longer, healthier lives, cats who are spayed or neutered make better, more affectionate companions.

Spaying or neutering is a one-time surgery with a one-time cost. But both procedures offer a lifetime of benefits. When it comes right down to it, if you can't afford to have your cat spayed or neutered, then you can't afford to have a cat.

Collar and Tag Your Cat

No matter how careful cat owners are, there's always the chance their companion may slip out the door and become lost. If that happened to your cat, would he be protected by a collar and identification tag?

An ID tag is a lost cat's ticket home. The tag should include your address as well as daytime and evening telephone numbers. It should be attached to a collar of the breakaway variety so that the cat can escape if the collar becomes snagged. The shelter should have more information about where you can obtain a cat collar and tag.

Keep Your Cat Healthy

Cats, like their canine counterparts, require basic care to stay healthy and happy.

A regular, nutritionally balanced diet is as important for your cat as it is for you. Shelter personnel or your own veterinarian can guide you in choosing an adequate feeding program.

If you don't yet have a veterinarian, it's a good idea to establish a rapport with one soon after you adopt a cat. The shelter may provide a list of local vets, or you can ask a pet-owning friend for a referral. Keep your feline companion up-to-date on his shots, and maintain a periodic examination schedule.

A Lifetime Commitment

Beyond those essentials, the rest should come naturally, and you can look forward to many years of companionship with your four-footed friend. Remember that a pet is your responsibility to love and care for from the day he arrives until the day he dies. It's up to you to provide him with a "lifetime guarantee."

Provided by The Humane Society of the United States.