

Chapter 1

Are You Ready to Get a Cat?

What's Inside . . .

- 🐾 Learn what time constraints a cat will put on your lifestyle.
- 🐾 Learn the costs of cat ownership.
- 🐾 Learn if your living situation warrants owning a cat.
- 🐾 Learn if a cat is the right pet for you.

You're looking for a pet and have decided that you want a cat. Congratulations! You're in good company. Many cat owners love their cats so much that they've become like potato chips—just one is not satisfying. In fact, the cat is the most popular house pet—there are nearly seventy-eight million cats who are house pets as compared to sixty-five million dogs.

Although a cat is more independent than a dog, a cat will still show plenty of affection to her owners, and nothing beats the coziness of cuddling up with your cat on a cold evening. Unless you want to train your cat beyond litter box training (which is easy with most cats), very little obedience training is required. In fact, many cat owners are happy with their cats' behavior, without ever having had to train them to sit, come, or lie down.

Because cats don't require the constant attention that a dog does, the busy family can still have a cat. This isn't to say that cats don't need attention; they do—just not as much as a dog needs. A dog usually requires kenneling when you go on vacation, but a cat can get along with just a pet sitter and may actually prefer it!

But that doesn't mean that a cat is a furry houseplant. Cats need affection, love, and attention, but they also need training (litter box and scratching to name two) and require (sometimes costly) veterinary care. Let's look at what's required of cat ownership.

Preventing Pet Overpopulation

If you adopt a cat from a shelter, you'll hear a lot about pet overpopulation and unwanted pets. It's been estimated that three to four million pets are euthanized every year in the United States. The reasons vary, but many cats are given up because their former owners bought them without understanding all the ramifications involved. By picking up this book, you've taken the first step toward responsible pet ownership.

Time and Living Commitments

Although cats are pretty independent, you may be surprised to find out that they require quite a bit of time from their owners. Overall, a cat is a fifteen-to-twenty-year commitment, which means you must provide for him every day—you can't take off for a weekend excursion without considering care for your cat while you're gone. You have to be ready to spend time with your cat at the end of the day. He needs food, water, and playtime daily, and you must scoop your cat's litter box every day.

Every day? Yes, every day. To give you a sample of these time and living commitments, here's an idea of what it takes to care for your cat daily.

As kittens, cats get into everything. You'll be spending your time trying to extricate your kitten from all sorts of trouble. He'll need a good deal of attention as a kitten to bond with you, and you'll need to watch him closely. You'll wonder how this cute ball of fluff could be so destructive so fast. Because of this, you'll need to spend time kitten-proofing your house, and you must put your kitten in a safe place when you can't watch him.

Feeding, playing with, and grooming your cat all take some time. Mealtimes are twice a day, which means you have to be there to feed your cat. In addition to feeding, you need to spend a half an hour or more playing with your cat to provide him with good physical activity and mental stimulation. Grooming takes time, too. Depending on the length of the fur, brushing and combing a cat can take fifteen minutes to a half hour.

Are you willing to scoop the litter box at least once a day? You need at least one litter box per cat, and you have to scoop once a day and clean the litter box once a week. Scooping takes a few minutes, but cleaning a litter box may take a half hour, depending on what's stuck to the bottom.



Training your cat is vitally important, too. While most kitties are, by nature, litter box trained, the biggest reason cats are euthanized is that they eliminate outside the litter box (see the discussion on litter box training in chapter 9). Cleaning up after a kitty who has gone outside the box may take fifteen minutes to a half hour per incident. Trying to retrain your

How Much Does a Cat Cost?

There’s no such thing as a free cat. If you decide to buy or adopt a kitten, you can expect certain costs the first year. The following is a list of potential costs and services you might use. I’ve tried to give a realistic price for these first-year costs, but your costs may vary based on your location and the services you use. *Note:* Not every cost is a one-time occurrence, so I’ve noted in parentheses when you can expect to pay for something more than once.

Item	Cost per Item	Total
Veterinary Care		
FPV/FVR/FCV combo vaccination	\$10–\$50 (x2)	\$20–\$100
Rabies vaccination	\$10–\$30	\$10–\$30
FeLV vaccination	\$30–\$75 (x2)	\$60–\$150
Office visit	\$10–\$30 (x4)	\$40–\$120
Spay/neuter	\$50–100	\$50–\$100
Deworming	\$20–\$50 (x2)	\$40–\$100
Supplies		
Travel carrier	\$20	\$20
Bowls	\$5–\$10 (x2)	\$10–\$20
Cat food	\$10–\$20 per month (x12)	\$120–\$240
Cat toys	\$3–\$10 (x6)	\$18–\$60
Grooming supplies	\$10–\$20	\$10–\$20
Collar	\$5–\$10	\$5–\$10
Miscellaneous	\$10–\$50	\$10–\$50
Services		
Boarding	\$10–\$20 per day (x 14)	\$140–\$280

cat to use the litter box may cost both time and money because of veterinary visits and devices to keep your cat away from areas where he’s been eliminating.

Cats can be downright inconvenient, too. You may be dressing up for the big party and find a hacked up fur ball in your shoes. You may invite the boss over for dinner and find that your cat left you a nice present in the form of a dead mouse on the chair where your boss was going to sit. Your couch might end up looking a bit ratty after your cat decides to redecorate it with his scratchings. Most cat owners are familiar with cat hair. Vacuuming it up (yes, it goes everywhere) can take extra time from your day. If you’re a particularly fastidious person, owning a cat may not be for you.

Financial Commitment

While cats are fairly low-cost pets, be aware that they aren't free. The cost of a cat goes beyond his purchase price. All cats require adequate food, supplies, and veterinary care. The cost of getting a cat in the first year usually amounts to several hundred dollars. If you rent your home, you may be charged a pet deposit or even an extra fee each month to own a pet.

Depending on your veterinarian's recommendation and your cat's risk of contracting diseases, your kitten may need a series of two to four vaccinations (usually a FPV combo and rabies), and he'll need deworming. If he's an outside cat, she'll also need to be tested for heartworm and will need a heartworm preventive. In addition, your kitten should be spayed or neutered as early as possible.

Most cats are expensive for the first year of their lives because they require vaccinations, spaying or neutering, supplies, and veterinary checkups. The cost usually decreases or remains steady during the cat's adult life (assuming no serious injury or illness) and then rises again as the cat passes 10 years of age. Problems such as cancer, arthritis, and other age-related diseases may crop up after that time.

But there are other costs related to owning a cat. Money spent buying treats, toys, cat trees, beds, cleaners and cleaning appliances, litter boxes, litter, and training items adds up quickly.

Environmental Requirements

So far, I've talked about the time and monetary requirements of owning a cat. The third requirement has to do with you and your lifestyle. Cats are very adaptable creatures, but there are situations that just aren't conducive to owning a cat.

An Outside Cat?

Because most people think that their cats must be bored if kept inside all day, many people are still under the notion that cats need to go outside. But your cat can be exposed to great danger when you let him outside. She can be hit by cars, chased by dogs, or fall victim to cruel humans who hate cats. If you live in a rural or even a suburban setting, your cat can become prey to coyotes and other predators. Furthermore, your cat can contract deadly diseases such as FeLV (feline leukemia), FIV (feline AIDS), and FIP (feline infectious peritonitis), which have no cure. The bottom line is the life expectancy for an outdoor cat is pretty grim—most don't live past 8 years old. Cats who stay inside or are properly contained outside (by a cat fence or cat run) are more likely to live longer than cats who are allowed to wander freely outside.



First and foremost, your cat must be safe and secure. That means you can't let your cat run loose in the neighborhood, whether you're in the country or in a big city. It's just too dangerous. Luckily, cats make great indoor-only pets. With the right amount of cat toys and cat trees, your cat will never even know what he's missing.

If you rent, be aware that not all apartments are cat friendly, although a majority of pet-friendly places are. Many rentals will allow cats even if they allow no other kinds of pets. Talk with your landlord about bringing in a cat.

If you have kids, you may be thinking that getting a cat is a good way to teach your children about responsibility. This is fine; however, an adult in your household must ultimately care for the cat. While children can help in the daily tasks, cat ownership requires a knowledgeable adult to oversee the cat's care. You really can't expect a young child to be responsible for a living, sentient creature. You can give kids tasks to do (as long as you follow up on them), but most children can't care for a cat properly on their own.

While kittens are adorable, they're also quite fragile. If you have very young children, they can hurt the kitten if they're allowed to play with it. Even gentle toddlers can be too rough for a kitten, so reconsider getting a kitten if your children are under 10 years old.

Questions to Ask Yourself

Consider the following questions when getting ready to adopt or purchase a cat or kitten.

A cat is a fifteen-to-twenty-year commitment. Are you willing to rearrange your life for that long to care for a cat?

Can you be home every day or make arrangements so that your cat can eat, drink, relieve himself in a clean litter box, and get enough playtime?

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Who will take care of your cat? Children can't be expected to take responsibility for a cat. A cat must be the responsibility of an adult in the household.

Are you willing to put up with a certain amount of destructiveness associated with a cat? Cats may occasionally urinate in inappropriate places and may scratch items that aren't supposed to be scratched.

Are you willing to train your cat not to be destructive?

Are you willing to teach your cat not to get up on counters or places where she could hurt herself?

Are you willing to put up with cat hair? Fur balls? Occasional "presents" from your cat?

Are you willing to groom your cat as required? Long-haired cats require more grooming than short-haired ones.

Do you have enough time and are willing to spend that time with your cat every day?

Are you willing to have an indoor-only cat? Barring that, are you willing to have a specially fenced-in backyard or part of a backyard that will allow your cat to enjoy the outdoors safely?

Are you willing to scoop the litter box every day and clean it once a week?

Is anyone in your family allergic to cats? If yes, you may have to consider getting a different pet.

Does everyone in your family want a cat? Everyone must agree on wanting a cat.

If you rent, does your landlord allow cats?

A free or inexpensive cat is *not* a cost-free pet. You must buy cat food, bowls, a bed, toys, and grooming items. Routine veterinary care and other care (should the medical need arise) will add to expenses. Are you prepared to take on the financial responsibility of owning a cat?

If you've answered these questions positively, you're ready to consider owning a cat.

A Truly Hypoallergenic Cat?

Pet lovers who are looking for a hypoallergenic cat may have found their answer. A company called Allerca is doing research to produce such a cat. Using a technology called gene silencing, they hope to block the Fel d1 protein (the protein that causes most allergies in people) in cats. You can find out more by checking out their website at www.allerca.com.

Before you rush out to purchase your Allerca cat, as of this writing, the technology hasn't been proven and reservations for an Allerca cat are pricey at \$3,500 a kitten. Also, the first litter of kittens won't be available until 2007. There are many questions as to whether this will work. It's probably best to wait and see if genetics can actually produce a cat who is truly allergy-friendly. At the moment, you're better off talking with your allergist on how to mitigate your allergies instead of investing in an unproven product.

A Good Match

Cats come with a variety of personalities—just like people. Some are wonderful to be around; others are cantankerous and curmudgeonly. However, finding just the right match can take some time and perseverance and may be difficult if you don't know what kind of cat personality actually suits you.

Not all cats are right for everyone. Even if you have the best intentions, sometimes you and a particular cat just won't click. Many people are surprised to learn that there are differences in each of the cat breeds. It's not just a matter of size, hair, or color, but a question of personality and activity level, too. No matter how pretty some cats are, if their personality doesn't fit your lifestyle, your relationship won't work, and the cat will most likely be the loser in this situation. So, think carefully about what's required to have a successful relationship.

Consider the following when deciding if a cat is right for you:

- Children can hurt small cats and kittens. Some cats will defend themselves and can hurt a teasing child with scratches. In the case of toddlers, kittens are not appropriate. In most cases, an older cat who has been around toddlers would make a fine pet. Many rescue groups and shelters have such cats.
- Apartment dwellers may not be allowed to own cats. Check with your landlord.
- Some cats require a lot of grooming.
- Cats may bring you presents, namely, dead animals or portions of dead animals.
- Boundary training is required to keep cats off counters and other parts of your home.
- Cats will climb on things and sleep on furniture.

- If you are an older person, a cat can accidentally scratch you and the scratch can become infected.
- If you have allergies, be aware that there is no such thing as a hypoallergenic cat. There are cats who have less of the feline protein that causes allergic reactions, but that doesn't guarantee that you won't be allergic to them.
- Many cats shed profusely. You will have cat hair on your clothes, woven into your carpet, and even in your food. Some pet owners joke that cat hair is a condiment.
- Cats can be very destructive. They often scratch things you don't want them to and may spray inside the house.

Myths Surrounding Cat Ownership

Surprisingly, there are a lot of myths when it comes to cat ownership. Cats have taken a bad rap over the centuries, and some of the myths exist to this day. Let's look at some attitudes about cats and see why they are just plain wrong.

- **Cats don't bond to people.** If socialized and handled properly, a cat will bond strongly to a person.
- **Cats don't need attention.** While cats are solitary hunters, they often choose to live in colonies when feral. Cats like the social structure and interaction.
- **Cats harm wildlife.** While this is true to a certain degree, cats are not responsible for the decline of certain bird species. Cats do hunt and kill birds, but they are better at hunting and killing rodents. The biggest threat to wild birds isn't cats; it's people. Inside cats don't harm birds. Also, cats help control rodent populations, which spread disease.
- **Cats can survive on their own in the wild.** A house cat is no wilder than any other domesticated animal and will likely starve to death in the wild.
- **Cats need to go outside.** A cat can be just as happy inside with plenty of toys and entertainment. Outdoor cats will likely have a life span of 8 years or less.
- **Cats cannot be affectionate.** Cats tend to give as much love and affection as they get. So, if you love your cat, she will love you back.
- **Cats are self-maintaining.** Your cat still needs food, water, training, affection, and veterinary care.
- **Cats are dangerous to babies because they will smother them or suck the life out of them.** While no animal should be left alone with a baby, cats do not smother babies. It is most likely that the cat enjoys the baby's warmth, if she's interested in him at all. It's now believed that many babies who were thought to have had the breath sucked out of them by cats actually died of sudden infant death syndrome.

Toxoplasmosis






If you're pregnant, you may be worried about owning a cat and risking toxoplasmosis. This protozoan parasite can cause birth defects and miscarriages in pregnant women who contract the disease while pregnant. Cats usually carry this disease because of their hunting habits. However, before you panic, be aware that over half the human population has already been infected with toxoplasmosis. If you're one of the lucky ones, you can't be further infected and there's no risk to your baby. (Ask your doctor for a test to determine if you've been infected with it in the past.)

Toxoplasmosis is transferred via the oral-fecal route, meaning that you have to touch cat feces and then stick your fingers in your mouth before washing them to contract toxoplasmosis. (You can also get toxoplasmosis from handling raw meat.)

Furthermore, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), cats kept indoors who don't hunt prey and aren't fed raw meat aren't likely to have toxoplasmosis. The CDC also says that once cats are infected they pass the parasite through the feces. It takes a day or two for the feces to become infective. In other words, if the litter box is scooped every day, the feces can't develop the parasite. Then, the parasite has to be ingested. Cats aren't infectious for more than two weeks if they have toxoplasmosis, so the chance of being infected is remarkably low. You're more likely to get toxoplasmosis from eating undercooked meat or gardening in infected soil than you are from your cat.

Having someone else clean the litter box or wearing gloves and a mask while cleaning it are further measures you can take to avoid getting infected. Talk with your doctor if you have any concerns about toxoplasmosis.

What You Now Know . . .

-  Cats require time, attention, and training.
-  Cats are not free pets. They require a certain monetary commitment.
-  You may want to reconsider getting a kitten if you have children younger than 10 years old, are constantly busy, travel frequently, or are unable to care for a cat or make the necessary time commitment.
-  Not all cats are alike. Look for a cat whose personality matches you and your lifestyle.
-  You must provide a safe and secure environment for your cat.