

Breeding Your Cat

- There are currently more cats in the United States than there are homes for them. As a result, millions of cats are surrendered to shelters and euthanized each year.
- Breeding should only be done to improve the breed, which requires a strong knowledge of the pedigrees and health histories of both the female and male cats.
- Responsible breeding requires a tremendous amount of time and money, as well as a commitment to ensuring that the kittens have good homes for a lifetime.
- Cats that aren't spayed or neutered are more likely to experience potential health and behavior problems.

Should I Breed My Cat?

Most shelters and rescue organizations are overflowing with mixed breed and purebred cats that are perfectly friendly and adoptable, but there simply aren't enough homes for them. As a result, approximately three to four million unwanted dogs and cats are euthanized each year, according to the Humane Society of the United States. Producing more kittens just exacerbates the current cat overpopulation problem.

What's Involved in Raising a Litter?

Before you breed your cat, honestly consider if you have the time, commitment, and finances required to raise a litter. Ask yourself the following questions:

- **Can I afford to raise a litter?** The mother cat should be vaccinated and dewormed before she is bred, and screened for diseases, such as feline leukemia and feline immunodeficiency virus (the cat version of AIDS), as well as any genetic problems she could pass to her offspring. The male cat should also be screened. Female cats will require prenatal exams, radiographs (or X-rays), and ultrasound examinations. If there are problems during the birthing process, she may need an emergency Caesarean section. After birth, the kittens will need veterinary exams, vaccinations, dewormers, and kitten food before they are sent to new homes.
- **Can I deal with the birthing process?** Can you be there to assist with the birthing process? Do you know what to do if there's a problem? If there are complications, the mother cat and/or some of the kittens may not survive. Remember, if you want your children to learn from the birthing process, it can be a difficult experience for them if things don't go smoothly.
- **Do I have the time to care for the kittens?** Some mothers reject their litters. If that happens, will you have time to feed each kitten several times a day and provide other care at this critical stage?

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What Are My Responsibilities as a Breeder?

Good breeders take responsibility for their kittens not just until they find a new home, but for a lifetime. Reputable breeders:

- **Mate purebred cats only to improve the breed.** They follow breeding standards and belong to breed organizations. They make sure that both the mother and the father cats are screened for genetic defects, and have the papers to prove their health and backgrounds.
- **Provide each kitten with individual attention to assure that it is properly socialized.** They want a kitten that's not only physically healthy, but enjoys interacting with people.
- **Interview potential owners to find the best homes for their kittens.** These breeders make sure the owners are financially prepared and

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committed to keeping the kittens for a lifetime, which can be 20 years or more.

- **Require new owners to sign a contract.** The contract may require that the owners spay or neuter the cat, and that they return the cat to the breeder, should they be unable to keep it. Both of these measures are designed to prevent cats from being surrendered to shelters.
- **Provide a health guarantee.** The breeder provides paperwork showing that a veterinarian has examined the kitten and found no inherited problems or diseases, and that early vaccination and deworming have been performed.
- **Are available to offer advice and guidance over the months and years ahead.** Good breeders are knowledgeable about the breed, and make themselves available to educate and advise the new owners.

Are There Any Health Risks Involved With Breeding?

There are always potential risks associated with pregnancy and birth, especially with very young or very old cats.

Whether you breed your cat or not, spaying or neutering can help eliminate some potential health and behavior problems. Female cats that are spayed don't develop uterine cancer and uterine infections; they are also less likely to develop breast cancer, and they also won't subject you to yowling heat cycles and unwanted litters. Male cats that are neutered are less likely to urine mark in the house or roam the neighborhood looking for fights.