

Welcoming your New Kitten

Posted by David on December 7th, 2010

The thought of bringing home a new kitten can be at once exciting and overwhelming. Here are some kitten-specific suggestions that will help make your new friend's welcome a warm and lasting one.

Kitten-Proof Your Home

Keep small items such as tinsel, rubber bands, buttons and beads out of reach—your kitten could choke on them. Place all electric cords out of reach. Also be aware of those household products and plants that may be harmful to your new kitten.

Cat Carrier

Bring your new kitten home in a cat carrier. Cat carriers are a safe and familiar place for your kitten when you visit the veterinarian or travel, and can keep your curious kitten out of trouble when need be.

Litter Box

You can help your kitten to understand what is expected by placing her in the litter box after feeding. Kittens do not need a full-size litter box and might do better in a box with lower sides (about 1 inch). You only need about 1/2-inch depth of litter.

Litter Box Training

Most kittens over 8 weeks are already litter trained, but in a new home, they should be confined to a small quiet room with a hard floor (no carpets) like a bathroom for at least 1 day, until they are consistently using only their litter box. If that will not be the permanent location of your litter box, after day 1, move it no more than 6 inches a day until you've moved the box to its permanent location.

Watch your kitten closely. When she begins nosing in corners, scratching the floor, or squatting outside the box, gently pick her up and place her in the litter box. Gently scratch the kitten's front paws in the litter or scratch in it with your own fingers next to her, so she begins to learn that this is the place to dig and bury waste.

If your kitten has an accident outside the box, wipe it up with a paper towel and place the paper towel in the litter box. (Clean up the accident with a pet enzyme cleaner so the scent will not draw her to go in that spot again.) Then place the kitten in the litter box and repeat the process of scratching with her front paws. Do not punish your cat for having an accident. This won't help her to learn to use the litter box, it will only teach her not to eliminate in front of you.

When your kitten begins to understand, don't take her good behavior for granted. Continue to praise her for using the litter box.

Grooming Your New Kitten

It is important to make your kitten feel comfortable about grooming from an early age. Look into her ears, eyes, nose and mouth regularly. Look at her paws to prepare her for claw trimming when she needs it. Brush or comb your kitten regularly.

Diet/Nutrition

Kittens can benefit from a different kind of diet than adult cats, as their stomachs are smaller and their nutritional needs somewhat different. Feed your kitten a kitten food that is specially designed to meet her nutritional requirements. Feed her in small amounts, several times a day.

Socialization

The experiences of kittens during their first few months of life are important in helping to shape their temperaments and personalities as adults.

Your kitten will need time to adjust to her new environment, and understanding this is the first step in getting off to a positive start. Place your kitten in a small, quiet room with food and a litter box. As she becomes more comfortable, you can gradually allow her access to other rooms in the house. Talk quietly to your kitten and gently pet her. Set a regular time and place for feeding your kitten.

A kitten separated before 8 weeks of age from her litter-mates and deprived of play activity with other kittens may demonstrate some behavior problems in later life. Play helps introduce her to her environment and is very important in her behavioral development. Stalking and pouncing on imaginary prey aids in a kitten's neural and muscular development.

Your kitten's socialization can be enhanced by frequent petting and handling, as studies show that petting a young kitten can make her more responsive as an adult cat.

Exposing kittens gradually to new people on an ongoing basis throughout their kittenhood is important in helping to lessen their fear of strangers as adult cats. Kittens should also be introduced to children. Show children how to pet the kitten. A kitten not socialized with children may reject or even bite them after she has matured.

Introducing Your New Kitten to Other Pets

Keep your kitten confined to one room of the house for the first few days, giving your other pet(s) a chance to grow accustomed to her smell. Put the kitten in a hard-sided crate so she is safe, put her down in the room with your other pets. Dogs should be on leash. Make the first introduction short and sweet, removing the kitten after a few

minutes. Continue these short crate sessions until everyone is relaxed and ignoring each other, which may take a few days or much longer. Then do short sessions with the kitten out of the crate. Dogs should stay on leash until they are ignoring the kitten. Even cat-friendly dogs can view a kitten as prey, so proceed with caution. If your pets are having difficulty adjusting, consult a professional cat and dog behaviorist.

Introducing a new kitten to an older animal can be very stressful on the older animal. Lavish most of your attention on the older animal, not the kitten, making sure that the old-timer doesn't feel threatened by the newcomer.

Holding and Carrying

Place one hand under your kitten's chest and use your other hand to support the rear. Gently lift the kitten into the crook of your arm.

Sleeping

Your new kitten will sleep up to 16 hours a day. Establish a sleeping place for her right away, but think twice before you make that spot your bed. Once she gets comfortable, your kitten may sleep there for the rest of her life.

Playing

It's not a good idea to use hands, fingers, feet or clothing when playing with a kitten, as your cute little kitten will eventually grow into a healthy-sized cat and you do not want to encourage aggressive behavior. Providing appropriate toys for exercising her natural predatory instincts of pouncing, stalking and chasing will ensure she has a safe and healthy outlet for these behaviors. Do not use toys that are too heavy for the kitten to move or that are small enough to be swallowed.

Scratching Post

A scratching post is an excellent investment for your new kitten. It will allow your kitten to scratch, stretch and exercise all at once.