



## OWNING A CAT

### TIPS FOR RESPONSIBLE CAT OWNERS

Cats have so much to offer - they provide companionship, affection and entertainment whilst being economical, clean and easy to maintain. They are generally independent, and require less supervised exercise and are relatively maintenance free.

However given these special qualities does not make it OK to take an irresponsible approach to having a cat. Like a dog, cats are a luxury and are there for our pleasure. Cat owners should be as responsible for a cat as what they would be to any member of the family. Cats can offer special relationships, are a good way to teach children responsibility and offer many health benefits for young and old. Research has proven that owning a cat can reduce stress, decrease minor ailments and reduce cholesterol levels.

The decision to obtain a cat is a very important decision and selecting the right cat needs plenty of thought and consideration including the local environment, potential for nuisance to neighbours, cost and the reasons why you want a cat in the first instance. Every breed of cat has a particular level of maintenance, the coat type is an important example. Cats also have different levels of independence and intelligence so selecting the right cat for your environment is crucial.

A lack of planning and forethought contributes to abandonment, surrendering and the currently very high euthanasia rate of cats. Remember these following issues when considering owning a cat:

- Desex your cat to reduce unwanted litters and high euthanasia rates;
- Keep your cat inside at night to reduce the incidence of transmissible and incurable diseases, cat fights, death to local wildlife and road accidents;
- Confine your cat to your own property to stop neighbourly disputes;
- Care for your cat properly such that it is healthy and has a stimulating home environment and a happy relationship with you.
- Interact with your cat daily. Cats need human companionship just as much as dogs do.
- Provide environmental enrichment. This may consist of cat runs with natural branches, trees or bushes, cat scratching poles, toys, comfortable bedding and plenty of opportunities to interact with humans. It is proven that cats are very happy kept indoors given all of the right ingredients such as filtered, fresh air and sunlight, play activities and plenty of room to roam indoors. Should you choose to keep your cat as an indoor cat, it is recommended that this is done preferably from an early age. Keeping your cat inside helps to prevent health risks associated with outdoor cats, including abscesses caused by cat fights, Cat Flu, leukemia or Feline AIDS, all of which require Veterinary care and can be very expensive and/or life threatening to the cat.
- Desex your cat before it's first season (recommended 5 to 6 months of age). Breeding is generally seen as unnecessary, because more kittens are born than there are good homes for. A desexed cat is less likely to fight, contract serious diseases relating to fighting (Feline HIV; Cat Flu or Leukaemia) or demonstrate antisocial behaviours such as spraying and the desire to mate. Many thousands of cats are euthanased by the Animal Welfare League and RSPCA every year. If you cannot afford to desex your cat, ask yourself if you can afford to care for one!



- Vaccinate your cat to protect it from potential life threatening diseases. Ask your veterinarian for more information.
- Check your cat regularly for fleas as they can cause illness in your cat and can irritate human skin too! They breed in the home environment, both indoors and in grass, carpet and bedding so check your cat regularly and keep its bedding clean.
- Ensure your cat has an appropriate place to go to the toilet (and not in the neighbours backyard!) Cats are fastidiously clean and it is important to make sure your cats kitty litter tray is cleaned daily.
- Confine your cat at night. The Cat Protection Society found that 94% of accidents (car accidents or fights) in a three week period occurred at night. Cats which are kept inside live at least three years longer on average than cats which are allowed out. Keeping your cat in at night is good for neighbourly relations and avoids the cat calling, or “caterwauling” along with other cat related complaints we receive.