

# The Pet Lover's Guide to Your New Cat

Thank you for adopting your new cat from the Tompkins County SPCA.  
Not only have you helped save a life, but you are about to embark on one  
of the most rewarding personal experiences—sharing your life with a cat!



**Tompkins County SPCA**

1640 Hanshaw Road, Ithaca, New York 14850 • (607) 257-1822 • [www.SPCAonline.com](http://www.SPCAonline.com)

MATTHEW FONDEUR





# Congratulations!

There are 59 million pet cats in the United States, and now that you have adopted a cat from the Tompkins County SPCA, you've made it 59 million plus one. Once you've outfitted yourself with some basic supplies and a little helpful advice, you'll see how rewarding it can be to live with one of these wonderful animals, the pet of choice since 3500 B.C.

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Cat litter box, litter and litter scoop
- Food dish
- Water dish or dispenser
- Scratching post
- Cat food
- Cat toys
- Cat brush
- Catnip (optional)



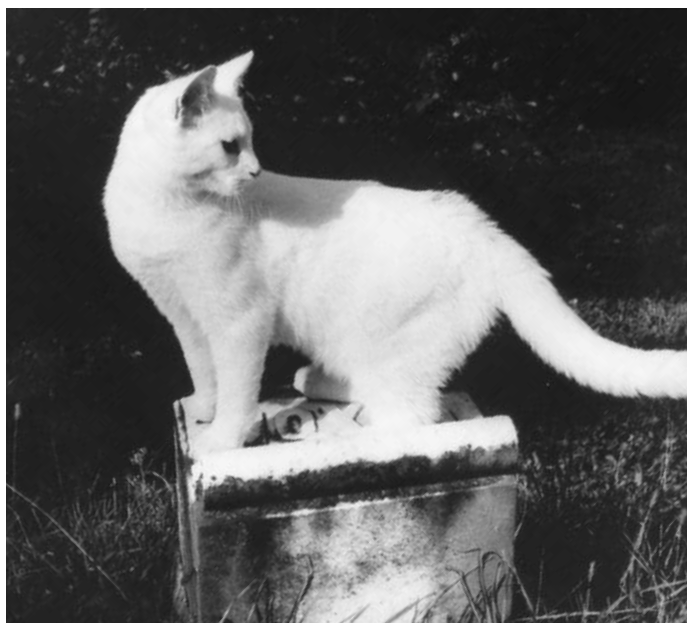
# Getting Acquainted

Cats have a well-earned reputation for being curious, independent and sensitive. They are so sensitive to their surroundings, in fact, that they require a great deal of adjustment to new environments. You can do a lot to help your cat companion feel secure in his/her new home.

## Your Cat's New Home

Keep the cat in her carrier until you have brought the carrier into a quiet room where the cat can be confined for a day or two (kittens adjust very quickly and generally do not need to be confined). This will be your cat's "safe" room. Have a litter box prepared in that room, as well as a scratching post and bowls of food and water. If you want your cat to feel especially at home, purchase a cozy cat bed ahead of time and place it in the safe room. Be sure that all the windows and doors in your house are closed, that loose electrical cords have been secured, and that any spaces behind appliances or large pieces of furniture are blocked off.

Once in the safe room, open the carrier and let the cat come out in her own time. Keep noise and bustle in your house to a minimum while the cat orients herself. Stay quietly in the room while the cat explores, offering attention and gentle stroking if she seems to want it. If there are no other animals in the house, it is all right to leave the door to the cat's room slightly open when you leave, but don't be surprised if your cat stays in one spot for several days before going exploring.



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## Hiding

Hiding is normal. Some cats spend their first few days, weeks or even months in a new home in hiding, usually under beds or in closets. Hiding is how some cats adjust to their new environments, and it does not mean that the cat is unaffectionate, unsocial or sick. Few cats can repress their curiosity enough to stay under a bed for more than a few days, but if your cat requires more hiding time, make sure she's getting food and water and is getting out at some point to use the litter box. Do not attempt to forcibly pull or drive a cat out from a hiding place, as this will only intensify her fears and make her adjustment harder.

## Introducing Your New Cat to Other Pets

Pets enjoy each other's company. A pet with a playmate can get more exercise, stimulation and companionship. But sometimes it takes a while for them to realize the wonderful advantages they're about to enjoy.

If you have other cats or a dog living with you, it is best to keep the new cat confined in the "safe" room for a few days while your established pets get used to her smell, and vice versa. When you bring cats together for the first time, it would be best to choose a day when you can be around the house, encouraging friendly behavior with praise and affection. Remember, your established pets can experience jealousy and other complex emotions. Be careful not to neglect your old friends in your excitement over the new cat. Nothing will irritate them more than seeing all the hugs and attention that they are used to getting being lavished on another cat. Tip the scales of treats and praise in favor of the resident pets.

A dog meeting a new cat should always be leashed. Supervise the encounter, and watch your dog for signs of aggressive behavior towards the cat. Curiosity is normal, but a dog who lunges at a cat is not safe to be off-leash with the cat. If your dog gets on well with the cat, but the cat shows you that she's feeling threatened during this experience, let her retreat to her "safe" room until she's willing to try again.



## Kids and Cats

There is no reason why young children and cats cannot be the best of friends, so long as your kids understand some simple facts about cat behavior. Read the section "How to Meet and Greet a Cat" aloud to your children and discuss it with them, and keep in mind these important reminders:

1. Cats DO NOT like to be squeezed, picked up by the neck or have their tails pulled. Cats are sensitive to loud noises and sudden movements, and will feel threatened if they are chased or lunged at.
2. Cats DO NOT like to be disturbed while they are eating.
3. Most cats DO like to be scratched gently under their chins or behind their ears and enjoy having their coats brushed.

# How to Meet and Greet a Cat

Cats sometimes feel threatened, over-stimulated or nervous when someone new approaches them. To try and make your introduction go smoothly, always approach a cat slowly and politely.

- Talk to the cat first. Cats are soothed by quiet gentle voices.
- Sit down and wait for the cat to come to you. Hold out your hand slowly for the cat to sniff.
- See if the cat will let you scratch him gently under the chin.
- Don't pet the cat's tummy, this is threatening to many cats.
- Even a friendly cat will scratch or nip when anxious or over-stimulated, so it is important to recognize when a cat is irritated. Most cats will give you "signals" if they have had enough.

The signs of irritation to watch for include a hiss or long, drawn out meow, flattened ears, wide open eyes, and/or a twitching tail. Also watch out if the cat refuses to make eye contact, tightens or flattens his body, walks away or refuses to sniff your hand. If you notice any of these signals, stop and give the cat some space.





# Care and Feeding

You may have heard that cats are "finicky" creatures. But in reality, cats require very little to be healthy and happy pets.

## Feeding Your Cat

We recommend a high quality (premium grade) dry food. At the Tompkins County SPCA, we feed cats dry cat food and leave fresh water out all the time. Feed kittens less than six months old at least three times a day; six months to a year old, twice daily; and adult cats, once or twice a day. Some families make dry kibble available to their cats all day. Consult with your own veterinarian about the type of food that would be best for your cat, and what amount would be healthiest. Don't feed your cat table scraps, chicken bones, raw meat, sweets, or foods containing alcohol.

## Training Your Cat to use a Litter Box

Once your cat has gotten used to your house and is no longer retreating to her "safe" room, the litter box can be placed permanently elsewhere in the house. Litter boxes must be kept clean so be sure to empty the cat's litter box at least once per day, and the litter should be changed weekly.

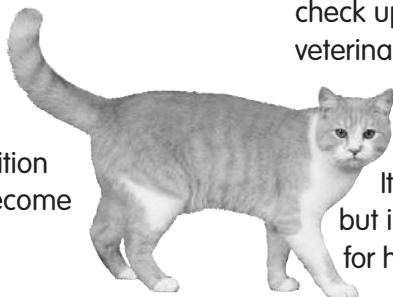
Cats are extremely tidy creatures and would rather go to the bathroom on almost any clean surface than eliminate in a dirty litter box. If the litter box is kept clean, your cat should use the box without the need for training.

If your cat is not using the litter box or stops using the litter box and the litter box is being kept clean, read the section "Unhappy Cats" for more information and helpful hints.

## Spaying or Neutering Your Cat

If all cat lovers spayed/neutered their cats, we wouldn't have so many kittens in our shelter every year.

In addition, there is no truth to the urban (and rural) myth that having a litter of kittens mellows a cat's disposition or that spay/neuter causes cats to become overweight and lazy.



In fact, altering a cat reduces the risk of urinary problems and cancer later in life, curbs the cat's compulsion to roam and mark territory by spraying urine, and makes them generally better behaved with small children and other pets.

Most cats adopted from the Tompkins County SPCA have already been altered. If your cat has not, you are required to make an appointment for spay/neuter surgery. If you are unable to afford this, we have low-cost opportunities that may be able to help.

## Letting Your Cat Outside

There is a big debate among animal shelters on whether cats should be kept indoors. On one side, an indoor cat is less likely to get lost, injured or killed. On the other hand, if you live in a safe area, the great outdoors may improve your cat's happiness. There is no hard and fast rule. Use your common sense.

If you are going to let your cat outdoors, wait approximately two weeks to allow the cat to get oriented and to get used to the sights and smells of his home. If you let the cat go outside right away, he is likely to wander and get lost. One note of caution, declawed cats should never be allowed outdoors as they cannot protect themselves or climb to escape predators.

Keep in mind that a rambunctious cat can be perfectly happy kept indoors so long as he gets plenty of attention and exercise. Take a few minutes to play with your cat every day. Plant some catnip in a small pot and let your cat nibble on it. Buy some cat toys. One great way to keep an indoor cat happy is to provide him with a playmate and a companion—namely, another cat.

## Keeping Your Cat Healthy

All cats adopted from the Tompkins County SPCA have received their initial vaccinations. They have also been tested for certain diseases, have been treated for fleas and worms, and have been screened for general health and behavior problems. In addition, any cat adopted from our shelter has a free initial veterinary check up within two weeks of adoption at participating veterinarians. We encourage you to take advantage of this and establish a relationship with a veterinarian of your choice.

It is true that cats have independent natures, but in reality your cat is entirely dependent on you for his health and well-being. A cat who

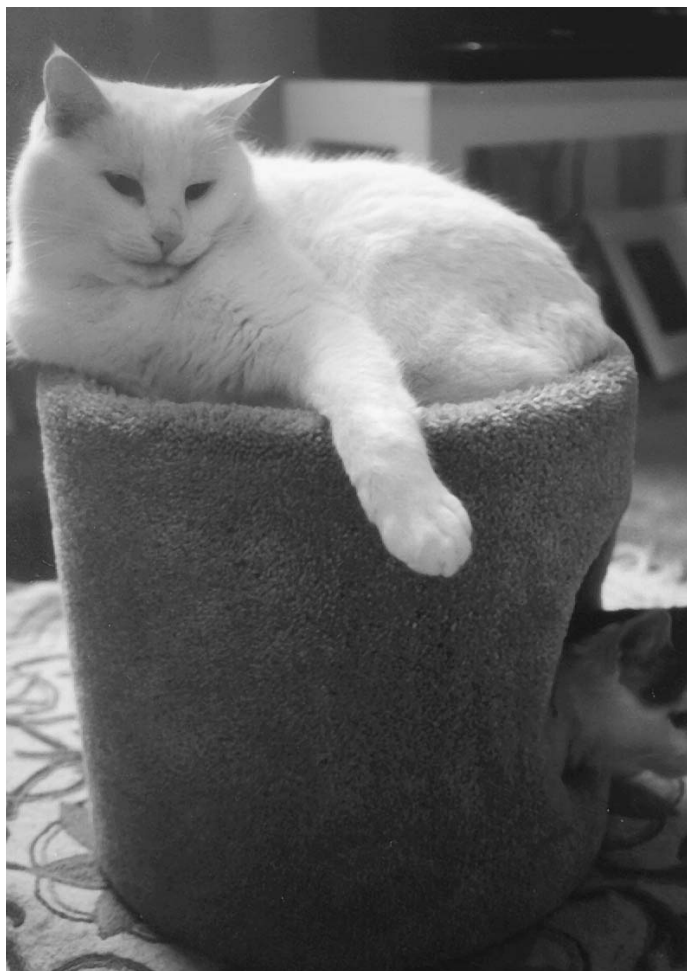
receives adequate nutrition and who receives periodic veterinary examinations will most likely live longer. At your initial visit, your veterinarian can discuss this further and her recommendations in more detail.

### **Keeping Your Cat Flea-Free**

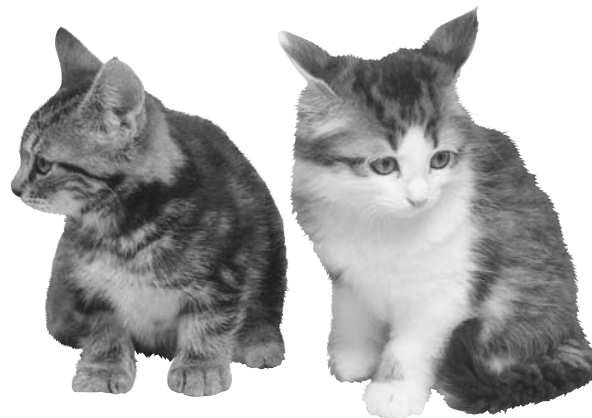
Flea collars are expensive and largely ineffective. By contrast, frequent vacuuming of your household and laundering of your cat's bedding can go a long way to reducing fleas. In addition, there are some good products that can be applied as little as once a month that can virtually eliminate fleas on your cat. Talk to your veterinarian.

### **Handling Your Cat**

Most cats who are handled with gentleness and respect will reward their caretakers with affection. Some cats, however, can be a little under-socialized or get over-stimulated. Never correct a cat's behavior by hitting or slapping her—that will only teach the cat to dislike and fear you. Read the section "Unhappy Cats" for more information on correcting unwanted behaviors.



WENDY KENIGSBERG



## **FAQs**

### **"I just adopted a cat and she won't come out of hiding. What should I do?"**

Hiding is the most commonly encountered "problem" among new adopters of adult cats. It is normal for a cat to hide when introduced to a new environment. Usually, the cat will come out on his own after a day or two, but some cats can hide for as long as a month. Make sure the cat has access to food, water and a litter box, and give him time to feel "safe" in his new home. Never force the cat out from hiding, this will only add to his fears. Spend some time every day in the room where the cat is hiding, sit down on the floor, and speak slowly and softly. Let him get used to your voice and smell.

### **"Why is my cat spraying in the house?"**

### **"Why is my cat missing the litter box?"**

If a cat is having litterbox problems, she must be seen by a veterinarian. Most litterbox issues are due to medical problems such as urinary tract infections, bladder infections, constipation, diarrhea, or cystitis. The cat may be having some pain or discomfort of which you are unaware. As a result, the cat may be avoiding the litterbox in order to have a more comfortable place to eliminate such as a bed, carpet or even the sink. Only a veterinarian can rule out medical problems. If a veterinarian rules out a medical problem, make sure the cat is spayed or neutered as spraying can be caused by a cat marking territory and/or seeking a mate. Also, make sure the litter box is kept clean. Never yell at the cat, hit or slap the cat, or rub the cat's face in his urine. This will only add to the confusion and may actually intensify the behavior. Read the section "Unhappy Cats" for more information.



### **“Why does my cat sometimes vomit?”**

Sometimes an otherwise healthy cat will make coughing sounds until she vomits a clumpy, fibrous mass of hair mixed with fluid. Usually, these are hairballs created in your cat’s stomach from the hair she ingests while grooming herself.

Brush your cat frequently to reduce the amount of loose hair on her coat. You can also buy hairball gel for your cat at any pet supply store that enables the cat to pass the hairball through elimination rather than vomiting.

A cat may vomit for reasons other than hairballs. If your cat is persistently retching or coughing, you should have your veterinarian examine her.

### **“My cats just started fighting with each other, what should I do?”**

Cats are naturally territorial animals, and need time to adjust to a new cat in the home. Even cats that have lived together for years may suddenly experience problems. If cats are fighting, you should not let the fighting continue—but should never punish the cats. Read the section “Unhappy Cats” for more information. Confine the cats to separate locations (giving each cat a “safe” place) with all their necessary items and speak to a behaviorist, or slowly reintroduce them as discussed in the beginning of this brochure. Most cats will work it out.

### **“Should I declaw my cat to get her to stop scratching the furniture?”**

No. Declawing is the surgical removal of the first joint of the cat’s paw. It is an unnatural and sometimes painful way of dealing with unwanted behavior; and one that can itself lead to stress-related behavior problems.

Cats scratch in order to maintain their nails, to stretch and exercise, and to mark their territory. This natural behavior just needs to be directed toward an appropriate scratching post. There are many good scratching outlets for a cat, as well as ways to make the furniture or rugs “unattractive” for scratching purposes such as hanging aluminum foil, citrus sprays, a strategically placed cat tree, or even draping a cloth over the target area.



## Unhappy Cats

Cats are not naughty or mean-spirited. When a cat “acts up” or develops perceived behavior “problems,” caregivers should keep in mind that the cat is most likely trying to tell them that something is wrong. Punishing a cat is really nothing more than blaming the victim. Telling ourselves that our cat “knows better” because he is acting “guilty” is not only untrue; it is little more than justification for our own anger.

If there is one rule in the world of cat behavior, it is that physical punishment does not work and can quickly lead to defensive and fear-based aggressive behavior. Correcting behavior “problems” in cats should only be done with positive reinforcement. In the case of litterbox problems, for example, even verbal correction tends to exacerbate the problem because the cat is already reacting to some type of stress (whether medical or environmental) and punishment just adds to the stress. The most important thing is to figure out what is troubling

the cat and then to change the circumstances. In many cases, the answer is simply avoiding those things that cause the cat’s undesired behavior.

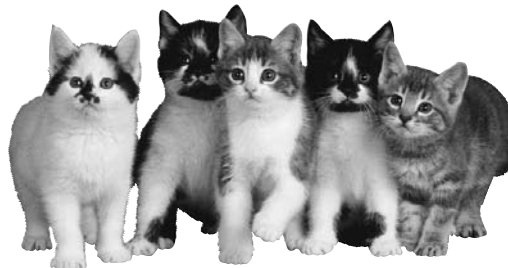
Whatever the “problem,” you should not wait to get help. The longer the unwanted behavior goes on, the more likely it may become a habit and harder to change.



# About the Tompkins County SPCA

The Tompkins County SPCA was founded in 1904 as a shelter of hope. Our mission is to:

- care for companion animals in need and to find a loving home for every adoptable animal in Tompkins County;
- foster, through education, community action, and example, an enriching, positive relationship between people and their pets;
- lead the way, through innovation and focus, in recognizing the benefits that companion animals bring, and by acting on our shared responsibility to them.





# Your Contract With Your New Cat

We, the \_\_\_\_\_ family, believe that our cat is a full member of the family. This means that he/she has the right to be cared for and loved. Each person in the family agrees to help take care of our new cat and treat him/her with kindness, patience, love and respect.

We know that caring for our cat means responsibilities and jobs that must be done every day. We will give our cat proper food and fresh water every day.

We know that it costs money to take proper care of our cat. We will bring our cat to a veterinarian for regular check-ups and when he/she gets sick or injured.

We promise to spend time with our cat every day to show him/her how much we love him/her.

We promise to love and care for our cat throughout his/her lifetime. We know that cats can live for up to 20 years and we will make every effort to keep our cat, no matter what changes life may bring. If we cannot keep our cat, we will make every effort to find him/her a loving, new home or bring him/her back to the SPCA.

Parents' Signatures:

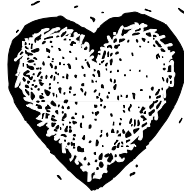
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Children's Signatures:

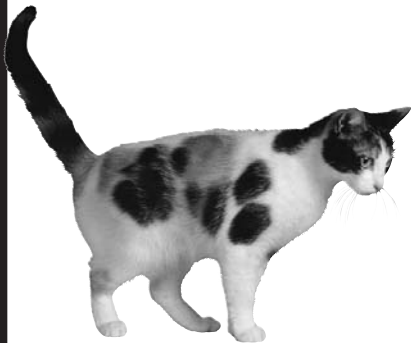
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## Tompkins County SPCA



At the Tompkins County SPCA,  
we dare to dream of building a  
No Kill community. We are not  
there yet, but with your help,  
we are making our dreams  
come true.



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