

LEARNING MADE EASY



# Kittens

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand



Explore your options to  
find the perfect kitten

Choose the right food,  
litter, and toys

Learn how to correct  
common behavioral issues

**Dusty Rainbolt**





# Kittens

by Dusty Rainbolt

for  
**dummies**<sup>®</sup>  
A Wiley Brand

## Kittens For Dummies®

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# Introduction

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I remember my first encounter with kittens. Someone moved away from an apartment complex, abandoning a poor pregnant cat during a rare Dallas snowstorm. I felt like Prissy in *Gone With The Wind*. I wanted to yell, “I don’t know nothin’ ’bout birthin’ no baby cats!” I didn’t have a clue what to do for them when they got here. Mom and all but two of the kittens found homes. Surprisingly, the two I kept survived their first year and are both still with me almost 18 years later.

That first year, the only thing I knew about kittens was how to spell the word. In those early days, I made a lot of mistakes because I didn’t know any better; I let the kittens outside and I fed them the cheapest food I could find. But the more I discovered about these amazing creatures, the more I loved them. When I first started fostering kittens, I found out what a difference premium food made in both their health and in the way the litter boxes smelled. I began keeping them inside the house for their safety. I stopped declawing them. Cats became my passion. Before I knew it, people were coming to me with their kitten questions. Who’d have thought? I don’t want you to make the same mistakes I made. I want you to have the information I wished I’d had as I raised my first little kittens . . . so I wrote this fun, easy-to-use book.

## About This Book

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Bookstores’ shelves are full of books about kittens. Most of them provide accurate information about kitten care. But in order to understand some of them, you almost need a degree in veterinary medicine. You won’t need to keep a medical dictionary sitting next to you in order to read *Kittens For Dummies*. I’ve explained everything to you in plain, everyday English. And because kittens are so much fun to have around I tried to make this book fun to read as well.

I’d love you to read this book cover to cover, and if you do, you and your kitten will benefit. But if you want to pick and choose information to get you through a particular situation, you’ll be able to find it quickly. You don’t have to wade through pages and pages of text to find out that a saucer of milk could give your kitten the runs so badly he could try out for the Olympic track team. Just a glance at the able of contents will lead you to that section.

I don't bore you with details about those rare diseases that affect only 1 in 10 million kittens here, but you can find out about colds and other diseases that any kitten can catch. I also tell you how to prevent them.

I go over some of the stupid mistakes I've made with my kittens over the years. I'm confessing my mistakes (and the hard-learned mistakes of others), so you don't have to do the same thing. I even include an entire section on how to rescue a kitten in trouble. I talk you through catching, bottle-feeding, and weaning that kitten, then help you find him a new home. You won't find that anywhere else, at least not alongside a comprehensive care guide.

You'll love this book because you can choose which section is most important to you at any particular moment. Look at the table of contents or the index for what interests you, and dive right in. And I try not to repeat myself. So when I talk about how to buy a kitten carrier, for instance, I also list the other places in the book where you can find out about flying with your kitten or how to best protect your kitten when you're driving around town together.

## Conventions Used in This Book

To help you navigate through this book, I've set up a few conventions:

- » *Italic* is used for emphasis and to highlight new words or terms that are defined.
- » **Boldfaced** text is used to indicate the action part of numbered steps.
- » Monofont is used for Web addresses.

Kitty elimination is a major part of your kitten's life, so we're not going to get hung up on formality here. When I've spoken to the nationally known behaviorists, they talk about pee and poop instead of urine and feces. I'm going to follow the lead of these experts and talk about pee and poop, too, just like the big boys.

And speaking of boys, I'm equal opportunity here. Behaviorally, boy and girl kittens exhibit similar personality traits after they've been spayed or neutered — especially if they've been altered early in life. Throughout most of the book everything applies equally to both boys and girls. I alternately refer to your kitten as “he” or “she” and “him” or “her.” I even do the same thing when it comes to spaying and neutering, except in the one section where I talk about the specific operation.



# What You Don't Have to Read

I've written *Kittens For Dummies* so you don't have to read every single word. I spent a lot of time writing this book, and I'd love for you to peruse every syllable, but if you're in a real hurry, you can skip past:

- » **Text in sidebars:** The sidebars are the shaded boxes that appear here and there. They share personal stories and observations. You also can find very specific information or technical details about a disease or product. Although the information may be helpful, sidebars aren't necessary reading.
- » **Anything with a Technical Stuff icon attached:** This icon indicates detailed medical or technical information that can give you a complete picture but isn't critical to your caring for or understanding kittens.
- » **Anything flagged with a The Cat's Meow icon:** This icon tells you about some of the exciting products I've tested in my other life as a cat product reviewer. If you're not interested in buying kitten stuff, you can just keep moving down the page.
- » **The stuff on the copyright page:** No kidding. You'll find nothing here of interest unless you're inexplicably enamored by legal language and Library of Congress numbers.

# Foolish Assumptions

I assume because you're reading this book that you:

- » Either have a kitten or you're interested in getting one.
- » Want to give your kitten the best care you can.
- » Want to have a close relationship with your new furry friend.
- » Want to keep your kitten as happy and healthy as you possibly can.
- » Want to understand how to communicate with your kitten and understand what she's trying to tell you.

# How This Book Is Organized

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To make it easy for you to get the poop on owning a baby kitty, *Kittens For Dummies* is divided into six parts. Each part addresses a different aspect of life with a kitten.

## Part 1: Your Companion for Life

You want to get a kitten, and you have so many decisions to make before you take the plunge! This part helps you sort out what you want and should expect from your future companion. You can figure out whether you want an energetic kitten or an older more laid-back cat. I also help you decide if you'd like a kitten-of-all-breeds or a specific breed. This part tells you where to look for the kitten of your dreams and gives you tips on how to pick out a kitten who's happy and healthy.

## Part 2: Preparing for and Bringing Home Your Kitten

This part tells you how to prepare your home, family, and other pets for a kitten. I tell you how to introduce her to everyone and what to fill both her food bowl and her litter box with.

## Part 3: Caring for Your Kitten

Your kitten is home. Now what? From primping to prevention, this part shows you what's involved in the day-to-day care of your kitten. I go over what to do when her tail is dragging and how to kitty-proof your home.

## Part 4: Kitten Psychology: Understanding Your Furry Friend

You and your kitten speak different languages. You need to figure out ways to understand the kitty language: Feline. Your kitten uses her voice, body language, and sometimes peeing outside of the box to get her point across. Part 4 helps your kitten understand what you're saying to her and gives you tips on how to translate her actions. You can use your new understanding of her way of thinking to keep her entertained and out of trouble.

## Part 5: Welcoming the Unplanned Kitten

Thousands of kittens need help. Some are so little they can't do anything for themselves. Others just need a helping paw to get them out of danger before you set them on the path to a new life. In this part, I go over what to do when you end up with an unexpected visitor.

## Part 6: The Part of Tens

In this part, I go over the kitten owner's happiest moments along with the scariest. You find out how to deal with the most common emergencies a kitten owner will face. At the opposite end of the spectrum, I give you some tips for entertaining and bonding with your kitten.

## Icons Used in This Book

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The icons in this book help you find particular kinds of information that may be of use to you:



TIP

You see this icon any time I offer you a suggestion to help you take better care of your kitten or make life easier or safer.



REMEMBER

This icon appears whenever I provide really important information you won't want to forget.



WARNING

Don't ignore this icon. It tells you when something has the potential to harm your kitten or cause you problems.



TECHNICAL  
STUFF

This icon flags text that gives you a more complete picture of what I'm talking about, but you can skip over this information unless you're detail minded or need some bathroom reading.

# Where to Go from Here

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Where you open the book and start reading depends on a number of things:

- » If you're still looking for a kitty companion, head to Chapter 2 to weed through all your options.
- » Chapter 3 helps you with your purchase of a registered kitten, and Chapter 4 gives you advice on how to adopt a kitten with a handicap or one from a shelter.
- » Rescuing a kitten from a dangerous situation is explained in Chapter 8.
- » I discuss what to do when your kitten gets sick and go over steps you can take to keep him healthy in Chapters 9 and 10.
- » You can read about grooming in Chapter 11.
- » You can start checking out behavior issues in Chapter 14.
- » Look in Chapter 17 for information about nursing unweaned kittens.

Anything I haven't mentioned can be found in either the index or the table of contents.

So now you're ready to embark on an adventure called kitten ownership. You'll find a lot of giggles, a few tears, and always a new discovery. Don't worry if you sometimes feel a little lost like I did. For you, I've created this helpful guide.

# Beyond the Book

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In addition to what you're reading right now, this book comes with a free access-anywhere Cheat Sheet. To get this Cheat Sheet, go to [www.dummies.com](http://www.dummies.com) and search for "Kittens For Dummies" by using the Search box.

# **1** **Your Companion for Life**

## **IN THIS PART . . .**

You're thinking about getting a kitten, and you have so many decisions to make! This part helps you decide whether a kitten will even fit into your lifestyle. If you decide you do want a kitten, Part I helps you figure out whether you want a specific breed of kitten or an everybreed. Then I tell you where to get him and even help you decide whether you want to adopt a kitten with a handicap.

- » Evaluating your lifestyle
- » Raising a healthy kitten
- » Raising a happy kitten
- » Deciding to take in an orphan

## Chapter **1**

# Getting the Lowdown on Owning a Kitten

**Y**ou're about to enter that wonderful and sometimes chaotic world of kitten ownership. This chapter helps you make those first important decisions about what kind of kitten to get, how to prepare your home for the new arrival, and how to keep him happy and healthy.

Before you do anything else, I recommend that you take the following quiz to help you evaluate your lifestyle and determine whether you're ready to adopt a kitten and whether a kitten would be happy in your home. You may decide to skip the whole kitten caboodle and adopt a mature, well-adjusted cat. Kittens can be high energy and high maintenance, so weigh your options before taking the plunge.

# Can You Fit a Kitty into Your Life?

Not everyone's cut out to live with a kitten. If you're not prepared, that little ball of fur can turn into, well, a pain in the cat. Before you head to the shelter or accept a kitten from a friend, stand back and look at your lifestyle objectively. Ask yourself the following questions:

- » **Am I a neat freak?** If so, a clumsy little kitten knocking over potted plants, tracking litter all over your floors, and leaving balls of fur on your couch cushions may be enough to put you through the roof. Adopt a pet rock instead.
- » **Do I plan to move soon?** If you may not be able to make arrangements to bring your new kitten with you, wait and adopt a kitten after you're settled in your new place.
- » **Does my landlord permit pets, and can I afford the pet deposit?** Arrange to pay your pet deposit before you adopt. Some landlords let you break the payment up over time and pay installments with your monthly rent payments. And don't think a kitten is easy to hide. An unauthorized kitten could have you scrambling for a new home when you get caught and kicked to the curb.
- » **Is my home already crowded with animals, and are my other animals aggressive or territorial?** Crowded pet environments tend to breed behavior problems. If you have aggressive or untrained pets, an innocent kitten may become a midnight snack. On the other paw, kittens make great companions for some older cats and dogs. See Chapter 6 for advice on introducing your new kitten to resident pets.
- » **Am I ready to take on the financial expense of raising a kitten?** Caring for a cat costs somewhere between \$400 and \$700 annually for cat food, litter, vet bills, and other expenses.
- » **Am I having personal problems or going through lifestyle changes like marrying, divorcing, or going off to school?** Even though kittens provide a great deal of comfort when you're going through a stressful time, you may find it impossible to keep him.
- » **Is anyone in my home allergic to cats?** You can do some things to reduce the dander like vacuuming daily and bathing the cat weekly. Allergic folks can also take shots, but if you're not prepared to make the commitment, you may want to adopt a different kind of pet.
- » **Do I work long hours or travel a lot?** A kitten can make the house so friendly to come home to, but a kitten at home by himself can't learn manners and tends to tear up the house. It may be better to adopt an older cat or a pair of cats rather than subjecting a kitten to hours and days of loneliness. If you plan on traveling after you get your kitten, check out all your options in Chapter 12.



- » **Do I have young kids under the age of 6?** Most youngsters under 6 don't fully understand that a kitten is alive and not a toy. If you do have young kids, you may want to wait until they're a little older to adopt a kitten, or consider adopting a mature cat who's used to living with small kids. If you feel your youngster can handle the kitten gently, be sure to teach her respect for the kitten before it arrives (see Chapter 6). Also plan to monitor your child's time with the kitten.
- » **Do I have time to train and play with my kitten to avoid behavioral problems?** Raising a happy, well-socialized cat with good manners takes work. He needs to be taught what's expected and he needs exercise and entertainment (see Chapter 15). If you don't have the time, your cute little ball of energy can turn into a large out-of-control pain in the neck.
- » **Am I willing to make time to groom my kitten regularly?** If you have a busy schedule that leaves little time for combing kitty, you may want to consider a shorthaired kitten instead of a longhaired breed such as a Persian. For more information on kitten maintenance, see Chapter 11.
- » **Can I make the 18-year commitment?** Raising a kitten takes a special person with a real commitment. An inside cat can live 15 to 20 years. That's as long as it takes to raise a child. Ask yourself if you're up to making that kind of commitment.

## FORGET DOG YEARS: WHAT'S THAT IN CAT YEARS?

Did you know that an inside kitten can live for 15 to 20 years? Forget the old wives' tale that one trip around the sun equals 7 kitty years. The following table shows you how your kitten's years really tick along.

Cat Years	Human Years
1	15
2	24
5	36
6	45
12	36
15	76
18	88
21	100

If you feel strongly that a kitten would be a welcome addition to your home, be sure to read Chapters 2, 3, and 4, where I help you weigh your kitten options: indoor versus outdoor, registered versus random bred, longhaired versus short, adopting from a shelter versus responding to an ad and so on.

## Keeping Kitten Healthy

A healthy kitten doesn't just happen. As the owner, you need to be proactive, because your kitty can't tell you when she feels sick. You should start as soon as you bring her home — maybe even before. Take the kitten to get checked out within the first week at home; or before you bring her home if you have other cats. If you don't have a vet already, check out Chapter 6.

You need to play voyeur when your kitten poops and pees, feel for lumps and bumps during her monthly exam (see Chapter 10), and watch for signs she's just under the weather. Take her to the vet annually and keep her current on her vaccinations. You can find out about the most common and deadly viruses and their vaccinations in Chapters 9 and 10.

You must make some important decisions about your kitten's health and well-being. One of the most important decisions you can make about your kitten's future is whether to have him (or her) fixed. Just a simple snip as early as 8 weeks old can mean the difference between your boy cat peeing on the wall or properly in the litter box. If you decide not to spay your girl, you may get less sleep because every few weeks she's going to keep you awake all night yowling because she's in heat. And early altering prevents several forms of cancer and other illnesses.

As with kids, kittens occasionally get sick or hurt. They're still young and vulnerable, with immature immune systems. You can find more detailed information on common kitten illnesses in Chapter 9 and about responding in case of emergencies in Chapter 20.



REMEMBER

Keeping kitty healthy takes more than vaccinating and worming — you need to exercise him mentally and physically to keep him entertained and out of trouble. I tell you how to wear him out when you're home and while you're away in Chapter 15, so he wants to snooze at the same time you do.

# Keeping Kitten Happy

Kittens keep you on your toes and challenge your imagination. You're going to need to put some effort into keeping your new friend safe and entertained. You need to search your home for objects, chemicals, and plants that have the potential to hurt your kitten. You also need to find out the difference between food that nourishes your kitten and something that can harm him. You need to give him things to do and introduce him to the house rules.

## Preparing for a warm homecoming

Like a newborn baby coming from the hospital, your kitten needs some accessories to make life easier for him and you. Start your shopping spree by buying a cat carrier so you can bring him home in safety. You can find out about all the cool stuff kittens need in Chapter 5. In Chapter 6 I tell you how to set up a *safe room* — a small quiet room where he can feel secure as he gets acquainted with your family.



TIP

Before you bring your kitten home or as soon as possible afterward, get down on your hands and knees and think like a kitten. Remove everything you can find that the new king of the house can chew, swallow, push over, or get tangled in. Pick up any loose string, loose screws, rubber bands, toxic plants, and so on. Chapter 8 has a long list of dangerous things to watch out for when kitten-proofing your home.

## Feeding to keep him fit and trim

Feed your kitten a quality diet. Spending a few extra cents per meal on better food is like collecting dividends on an investment. After all, it keeps your kitten healthier, and that pays off big when she gets older. Find out all about the best foods to feed your kitten in Chapter 7.

## Occupying his every waking hour

Kittens aren't as high maintenance as puppies are, but they still need plenty of love, attention, and patience. Taking the time for the right kind of play helps you bond with your kitten. It also makes her less likely to seek out trouble around the house.

# Opening Your Home to an Orphan

Few things tug at your heart the way a lost or orphaned kitten does. So I give you the lowdown on what to do when you come across a needy little kitten. In Chapters 16 I tell you what to do and where to turn for help when trying to rescue a weaned kitten, and in Chapter 17 I go over how to raise a bottle baby. I also give you some tips on health and behavioral issues that orphans have in Chapter 18. Finally, in Chapter 19, I tell you what to do with your little friend when he gets big enough to live without your constant attention and help you decide whether you want to keep him or find a new home. Raising an orphan is a lot of work, but the process isn't as complicated as most people think.

#### IN THIS CHAPTER

- » Staying inside or out
- » Going over the advantages of kitten age
- » Thinking about cat hair
- » Choosing a male or a female
- » Deciding if you want a registered kitten
- » Going to the right place to get your kitten
- » Picking a great kitten

## Chapter 2

# Choosing the Right Kitten for You

**O**ne or two? Longhaired or short? Boy or girl? Random bred or a kitten with a pedigree? Geez, what a lot of decisions to make before you select your first kitten! Lucky for you, this chapter helps you find your perfect match — a kitten whose personality is compatible with the lifestyle of your family. Or maybe you'll decide to adopt two kittens or an older kitten or even a cat. If you decide on a cat, pick up *Cats For Dummies*, Second Edition, by Gina Spadafori (Wiley Publishing, Inc.).

# Living As an Innie or an Outie



REMEMBER

One of the most important decisions you must make for your kitten is whether he will live as an indoor cat, an outdoor cat, or will come and go as he pleases. Whether your kitten will live inside or out affects how much grooming he requires and which vaccinations you need to keep him updated on. You also want to consider the ordinances in your community concerning cats running loose. And never declaw a kitten who you're going to let outside. Find out about declawing in Chapter 14.

## Out and about

Statistics show that outdoor cats live significantly shorter lives than inside cats — the outie lives only 7 years, but inside cats average a whopping 14 to 18 years. Whether he lives outside fulltime or comes and goes at will, an outside cat's life is cut short by diseases, fights, cars, marauding dogs, evil kids, and poisons — not to mention his own curiosity (see Figure 2-1). You can discover all the horrible things that can happen to your kitten outside your home in Chapter 8. (Can you tell I'm against keeping your kitten outside? I had to learn the hard way.)

When I discuss the difficulties faced by outdoor kittens, I'm talking about both full-time and part-time outsiders. They're both exposed to the same risks, just for different lengths of time. However, kittens who live outside exclusively need added help when it comes to extremely cold and extremely hot weather. In the cold winter months, you must provide your kitten with shelter and warmth to prevent frostbite, and in hot weather you need to make sure she has fresh water; otherwise she's at risk of dehydration.



WARNING

And never, under any circumstances, let a declawed kitten go outside without supervision. Because claws are a kitten's first defense, a clawless kitten is a sitting duck (or sitting kitten?) for roaming dogs and predators. Also, he can't climb a tree fast enough to get away.

I used to let my kitties hang out in the neighborhood when they wanted to — before I learned better. I had kitties getting into catfights, hit by cars, chased by dogs, trapped in a neighbor's attic, and caught in a garage door mechanism, and