

Good Breeding

Good breeding means the kitten was bred to optimize appearance, temperament, and health. While in the pedigreed cat world breeding is documented and certified, that pedigree does not mean a kitten has good breeding. So how do you find the breed that is right for you or find the breeder following good breeding practices?

First, gather information about breeds you like. The following registries can help you in your search by providing a list of breed descriptions and breeders.

The three major registries are American Cat Fanciers Association, www.acfacat.com (417-725-1530) Nixa, MO; the Cat Fanciers Association, www.cfainc.org, (732-528-9797) Manasquan, NJ; and The International Cat Association (956-428-8046) Harlingen, TX, www.tica.org.

Second, as you are learning about the various breed choices consider your lifestyle. Some breeds are more active and need more space. Temperament also varies and requires consideration, as do other family members, your time, and your experience with animals. Finally, while pedigreed cats are bred for certain traits, TICA Allbreed Judge Ellen Crocket warns, “There are always exceptions,” so be flexible.

Another source of information is the breed club/association. Breed clubs are listed in the classifieds of cat magazines and found on the Internet by a simple search. Because breed clubs are often volunteer based they vary in what is offered but should supply a list of breeders. Also look for breed specific diseases, temperament, and descriptions.

Both breed clubs and registries provide information on good breeding practices.

Don't forget the most obvious sources: visiting cat shows and networking with family and friends. Cat shows are sanctioned by registering associations.

After making the decision about the breed, finding a good breeder is the third step. Remember, you are looking for one selecting for appearance, temperament, and health.

“The good breeder welcomes questions and has objective answers,” says chemistry professor Liz Hanson, breeder of Maine Coons and owner of Chemicoons Cattery. If phoning, be sure to ask if it is a convenient time. When emailing leave time for a response.

Questions to cover: Are both the cats and the cattery name registered with an association? Is the cattery inspected annually and certified? Are all the kittens seen by a veterinarian at least once and at least 12 weeks of age before release? How does the breeder differentiate a pet, breeder, or show quality? Are the parents tested for genetic disease? FeLV and FIV free? Does the breeder show? Does the kitten come with a written contract and health warranty? Are references available? Can you visit the

cattery or have a friend visit for you? Are pictures and/or videos of the cattery, cats, and available kittens?

A cattery visit is the best source of information. Look for a clean well maintained facility, spacious accommodations, and active attentive cats and kittens with bright eyes and shiny coats. Also be aware of the knowledge and professionalism of the breeder.

The good breeder often has a waiting list (many are repeat buyers) knows the individual kittens, enjoys talking about the cats and is matching you with the kitten best suited to you. This process takes time says Ocicat breeder Anne McCullough of Catiators Cattery in West Virginia, "Kittens should not be an impulse buy."

Heather Roberts, Ph.D., and owner/operator of Chaparral cattery outside of Davis, California, says, "An ethical breeder should have a working knowledge about the history of the breed, knowledge of the genetics and how traits are inherited." She says good breeders provide client support and do not pressure customers to buy.

A final and very important step in obtaining a pedigreed cat is the purchasing agreement contract. A good breeder will have a contract available so you have plenty of time to ask questions. Roberts advises, "Get everything in writing. Contracts keep friends." Just as important, read the contract carefully and make sure you will abide by the terms. If you have questions ask them before signing!

Contracts vary with respect to deposits, payment methods, and pricing but arrangements and receipts are clearly stated. A contract should include the following: identification of kitten, the release conditions of the registration papers, what is expected of you, what makes the contract null and void, what you can expect from the breeder and what to do if you cannot keep the cat.

A good breeder will provide a written health guarantee/warranty. Does the health guarantee contain a record of inoculations and contact information for the kitten's veterinarian? Is there a congenital guarantee that covers future issues? Finally, what is the time of the health guarantee, and how will health issues be handled? McCullough says, "[A good breeder] can't guarantee your cat won't develop some ailment, as all living beings may, but they can support you and provide you with whatever help you need throughout the life of your cat."

In the pedigreed cat world, "good breeding shows."

Ellen Crocket: TICA Allbreed Judge Ellen has had experience in breeding Devon Rex, Persian, Sphynx and American Shorthair. Her cattery Vicrock is located in Washington State where she now concentrates on Devon Rex.

Liz Hanson, breeder of Maine Coons and owner of Chemicoons Cattery (so named for her professorship in chemistry at Lindenwood University outside of St. Louis, Missouri)

Anne McCullough Ocicat breeder of Catiators Cattery, West Virginia

Heather Roberts, PhD in Biology with a post doctorate in feline genetics breeds Singapura and Bengal cats outside of Davis, California under the cattery name Chaparral.