

CONSIDER ADOPTING AN ADULT CAT

There are many advantages to adopting an adult cat instead of a kitten.

For starters, the playfulness of kittens is part of their charm, but it has its downside.

You have to be able to live with what we call the kitten-zoomies, says Gail Buchwald, senior vice president of the ASPCA's Adoption Center and Mobile Clinic in New York. Kittens have very high energy levels. They can be trained, but be warned: "It's like telling a teenager to chill out," she says.

Bringing any new animal into your household requires some adjustments, of course. But babies of any species require more "child-proofing," and often have an inconvenient concept of the daily schedule.

If you have plants, rugs, things that can be knocked over - all of those things are going to be changed," says Buchwald. "These antics are cute, but maybe at five in the morning when you're trying to sleep you don't want the blankets pulled off."

In contrast, adult cats are calmer and less energetic. In addition, by 2 years old, they have clearly developed personalities.

"Then you really get to see what kind of cat you've got," says Buchwald. "If someone comes in and says 'I want a lap cat,' I can do that."

If someone wants a playful cat, it's hard to judge that trait in a kitten. "All cats are playful as kittens, but you don't really know what you're getting later on. With a mature cat, we really see what this cat is going to be like as a companion," she says.

Adult cats are also a much better choice for homes with small humans.

"Young children of toddler age don't know their size and strength, and kittens can be rather fragile," says Buchwald. "You're more likely to have a successful experience with both the cat and the children if the cat is an adult."

Still, those little balls of fluff sell themselves, and despite all the rational arguments, you may decide you want a kitten after all. If so, take two - they're small.

"If someone wants to adopt a kitten, we encourage them to take two. They can entertain each other, which keeps them out of the pet owner's hair," Buchwald says.

Kittens also help raise each other. They learn bite inhibition when playing roughly, backing off when their playmate squeals. "They teach each other that very well when adopted out in pairs," and then can apply it to their human companions as well. Without this mutual education, "a playful love bite can break the skin."

Raising a kitten is less complicated than raising a puppy - no need for housebreaking or teaching polite behavior in public. But, "frequently people have misconceptions about what it takes to entertain and be the caregiver for a kitten," says Buchwald. "People will bring a kitten back to the shelter and say 'There's something wrong with him, he never calms down, he runs around all night.' We say, 'Diagnosis: Kitten.' "

Of course, kittens don't stay kittens forever. On the bright side, they grow up into better, calmer companions. But they also lose their baby cuteness - and many end up back at shelters, where the ASPCA estimates that 70 percent will be euthanized.

source: ASPCA