



Somerset Regional Animal Shelter

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Cat Adoption Packet



Visit us on Facebook at

www.facebook.com/somersetregionalanimalshelter

www.sras.petfinder.com

Thank You for Adopting!

Thank you for adopting your cat from the Somerset Regional Animal Shelter (SRAS).

We hope you will be very happy with your new companion. In this adoption packet you will find a variety of helpful hints and materials, including important documents about your new companion and the adoption process. We encourage you to keep these documents in a safe place along with your other important papers.

When one of our cats leaves the shelter to start his or her “new beginning” we feel great happiness for the cat and his or her new family. So we again thank you for giving your cat a loving home, and we hope you will encourage others to consider adopting a cat from SRAS or another shelter, so they too can experience the joy of finding a new best friend.

We encourage you to send along pictures and to tell us how your cat has settled in at home. We have a growing community on Facebook and we welcome your posts:
[facebook.com/somersetregionalanimalshelter](https://www.facebook.com/somersetregionalanimalshelter).

SRAS is a resource for success

If you have immediate questions about your new cat, we encourage you to look through your adoption paperwork. Most common questions— such as what vaccines your cat has received—can be found in your cat’s paperwork. If you have questions that aren’t answered in this packet, please call the shelter at **908.725.0308**. SRAS appreciates the opportunity to keep in touch so we can continue to help you with the bond you’ve established with your new companion.

As an organization that has matched over thousands families with companion animals, we have extensive experience and information to help new guardians with their cats.

We want your new relationship to be successful, so if problems arise, we hope you try the resources we offer as well as other professional resources in the community to make your relationship work. Included in this packet is information on most common issues such as litter box use, inappropriate scratching, along with a variety of other behavior and training topics.

Please don’t hesitate to contact us at **908.725.0308** to share your concerns.



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New Cat Supply Check List

Basics

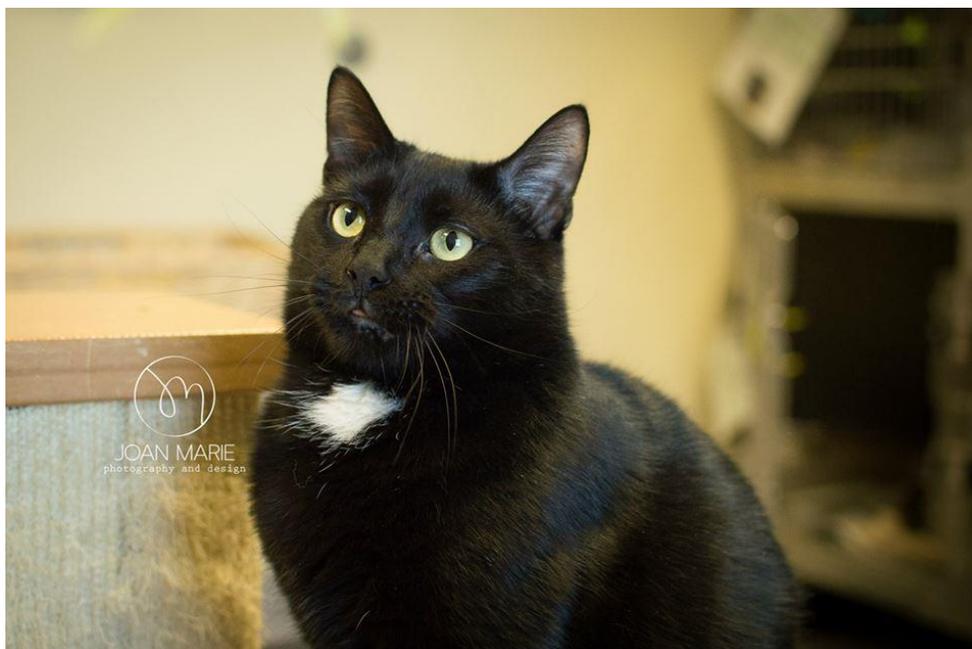
- Food
- Water and food bowls
- Cat bed
- Scratching post (cardboard and sisal)
- Cat carrier
- Breakaway Collar and Tag
- Litter box (hooded or high sided recommended)
- Litter, litter scooper
- Enzymatic cleaner

Cat Care

- Cat toothbrush, cat toothpaste
- Nail trimmer
- Grooming brush
- Flea control treatment

Training and Mental Stimulation

- Harness, leash
- Food dispensing toys (KONG® Cat Wobbler, treat balls)
- Interactive toys (wands, feather toys, mitt toys)
- Play-alone toys (squeaky toys, fluffy balls, crinkle/crackle balls)
- Soft treats, crunchy treats, freeze-dried meats
- Catnip, catnip spray, catnip toys



Settling In – The Transition Period

Provide supervision

Think “safety first” as you help your new cat settle into your home. When transporting your new cat, properly secure him inside the main vehicle compartment using a cat carrier. Do not let him travel loose inside the vehicle.

Once you arrive home, help your cat settle in as smoothly as possible by providing close supervision. Many cats will be nervous when they first arrive at the new home. They may want to hide under furniture for hours at a time. When they first arrive home, you should confine your cat to a safe area, such as a bathroom until they become acclimated to their new surroundings. This is especially important when bringing home a shy cat. The safe room should contain all the basics (as mentioned on the checklist). We recommend a bathroom so that your cat can't find places to hide, such as underneath the bed, or under furniture. Be patient and do not force your new cat or kitten to come out. Be sure food, water and a litter box are nearby. **See “Litterbox Do's and Don'ts** in this packet for additional tips. If they appear unsure about eating, it is best to provide them with plenty of water and have dry meal out for them to nibble on throughout the day. Another tip you can use to coax a nervous cat to eat is either soaking dry food in water, or heating wet cat food in the microwave.

Introducing your new cat to your resident cat

Each cat will react differently to his new surroundings, thus, adjustment periods will vary a great deal. Adjustments to your new family or resident animals may take some cats a few days, while taking others several months. Patience during this process is vitally important. Keep cats confined to a safe room of their own while slowly introducing them to your resident animals. Never force or rush a meeting. If you are introducing your new cat to a resident cat, let them sniff each other under doors. You can also rub the new cat with a towel and place that towel underneath the resident cat's feeding bowl and vice versa. Let your new cat explore your home while the resident cat is confined. You can also swap bedding, letting each cat get accustomed to the smells of the other.

If a fight breaks out between the two cats, throw a blanket over one of them or use a squirt bottle full of water or simply clap your hands loudly to gently break it up. Hissing and standoffs are to be expected, but your patience will help ensure a smooth transition.

Introducing your new cat to your dog

If your family includes a dog, keep him leashed during any introduction periods to ensure he cannot chase or harm your new cat. Introductions should always be done while supervised and new cats should never be left alone with resident dogs until a consistently safe relationship has been established. This can take several months, be patient. It helps if your dog knows basic obedience commands such as sit or leave it, so that you can distract your dog if she tries to chase the new cat. Create a safe area for your cat where a dog cannot follow. Tall cat trees or baby gates will help give your cat a safe place to hide if she feels overwhelmed by the dog. There are pet gates with a cat door in the middle that are quite helpful for giving your cat a safe escape route, should she feel the need to flee. Be sure the cat's food, water and litter box are in an area that is safe from dog interruptions.

See handout on Introducing Your Cat to Other Pets for additional details about introducing your new cat to your resident animals and how to help them adjust to living together.

Teaching Children Pet Safety Rules

First and foremost, make sure your children understand that a pet is a living creature to be cared for and respected. Animals have needs and feelings, and they rely on us, their caretakers, for

companionship and loving care. To help form this relationship, get children involved with caring for your new companion with age appropriate activities, such as feeding, playing with toys and gentle petting. Supervise pets and children at all times and never leave them alone together. Accidents happen even with the most trustworthy children and pets.

Here are some handy tips to help your pets and children have a safe and happy relationship:

- Always pet an animal gently, with no pulling or tugging, and never from behind
- Remind children to use their “inside” voice when interacting with pets, no shouting or screaming
- Tell children to avoid contact with a cat’s waste, which can transfer disease. Young children are especially tempted to reach into the cat’s litter box; it looks like a mini-sandbox! Take steps to ensure that they don’t have easy access to litter boxes by using gates or cat doors if needed
- Cat toys are especially tempting to young children because they have jingle bells and vibrant colors, be sure to keep these out of reach when you’re not there to supervise as they can present a choking hazard

Your Cat’s Health

SRAS is committed to the health and welfare of the animals in our shelter, and provides high quality care in an effort to place animals who are healthy. In a large-scale cattery environment, whether it is a boarding facility, breeder, retail outlet or a shelter, a number of transmittable illnesses can be passed among animals within a common living area. Some animals may not exhibit symptoms during their stay at the shelter and may only show signs of illness once they have been placed in a loving home. By adopting you have committed to providing your new cat with any medical care he or she may require.

Please see your cat’s paperwork for details on the diseases he has been tested for and the medical treatment he received while at SRAS.

Veterinary Visits and General Health Care

When visiting the veterinarian for the first time with your new cat, take the medical records provided by SRAS with you. Check your adoption packet for additional health waivers or inserts that may have been provided as well. This will alert the doctor to any vaccines, parasite treatment, surgery or other procedures that were performed. SRAS gives cats the basic FVRCP vaccine combination and a dewormer, as well as testing for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FeLV/FIV). Some cats will have a rabies vaccine if it is age appropriate.

Other important ways to keep your new cat healthy are providing routine medical care, including yearly wellness visits, flea and parasite prevention, good nutrition, proper grooming, exercise and socialization.

If your cat is not feeling well

When your companion animal is not feeling well, she may show signs such as loss of appetite, lethargy, loose stool, hiding, or vocalizing. These symptoms could indicate an illness, such as upper respiratory infection (URI), or may mean that your cat is simply adjusting to his new surroundings. It is always best to consult with your veterinarian if your cat appears to be unwell.

A common ailment seen in newly adopted cat is upper respiratory infection (URI). While in our care, we try to ensure that all cats are healthy prior to adoption (unless otherwise noted). Even so, illness

can occur despite our best efforts. Please be sure to check your email (or spam folder) for details about your free month of pet insurance, as this policy may cover many of the common ailments seen in shelter pets.

Symptoms of Upper Respiratory Infection (URI)

The first symptom is usually sneezing. Additional symptoms include:

- Discharge from the nose or eyes,
- Loss of appetite
- Lethargy

You should consult your vet or shelter if you see cold symptoms. Most URI's are viral, so medical care is generally supportive. Since cats are susceptible to secondary bacterial infections, vets will sometimes prescribe antibiotics to prevent further illness. It's important to make sure that your cat continues to eat because when cats get stuffy noses they lose their sense of smell, and cats that can't smell their food will generally refuse to eat it. Introducing a smelly (fishy) wet food, usually helps entice them to eat.

Litter Box Overview (courtesy of SF SPCA)

The best way to introduce your cat to her new home is to confine her to one room or area—her safe haven. A further benefit to this approach is that it helps prevent litter box problems. However confident and ready to explore your cat is, keep her confined to the safe haven until she has used the litter box at least once.

Litter Box Do's and Don'ts

DO

- Have enough boxes. You need one litter box per cat in the household, plus one extra.
- Experiment to find a litter your cat likes: clumping, non-clumping, pellets, etc.
- Keep the litter box immaculate; cats are extremely fastidious.
- Use mild dishwashing liquid or hot water and vinegar to clean the box.
- Scoop the box every day. Clean the box every two to three days, or at least weekly.
- Place the litter box in a quiet, private area away from food and water bowls.

DON'T

- Use scented litter. Perfumed smells tend to repel cats.
- Get a box that's too small; your cat needs space to turn around, dig, and cover.
- Leave waste sitting in the litter box; nobody likes a dirty bathroom.
- Use strong chemicals or disinfectants to clean the box.
- Use a litter box liner or a restrictive box.
- Place the litter box near anything noisy, like a washing machine or furnace.
- Place the litter box in a high-traffic area in your home.

Tip: If you have a multi-story house, have litter boxes on each level.

Litter Box Problems

First, it's important to know that your cat isn't going outside her litter box out of spite. She is either stressed, marking territory, or avoiding the litter box because she doesn't like it. Cats can form aversions to the litter box for a variety of reasons, so do a bit of sleuthing. Litter box problems are common and usually very fixable.

Troubleshooting Litter Box Problems

1. *Always begin by consulting your veterinarian to rule out medical causes.*
2. Check all the do's and don'ts above to make sure you're following the guidelines.
3. If the problem could be stress-related (new cat in the area, construction outside), deter stray cats from your yard and restrict your cat's view/access to windows, noisy areas, etc.
4. Could it be roommate squabbles? Confine your cats to separate areas of the house. For more information see *Cat to Cat Introductions* in the Resources section of our website.

Inappropriate Elimination

If your cat is showing signs of inappropriate elimination such as spraying, marking or not using the litter box consistently, this may be an attempt on her part to communicate with you that there is something physically wrong or something she does not like about the litter box.

The first thing to rule out is a medical condition. Cats eliminating outside of the litter box could indicate a medical condition including (but not limited to) urinary tract infections, or a urinary blockage, a life threatening condition that **requires an immediate visit to your veterinarian** as this condition can be **FATAL!**

Symptoms of Urinary Blockage include:

- Straining in the litter box with no output
- Excessive licking in the genital area
- Frequent trips to the litter box
- Eliminating outside of the litter box

Other reasons your cat may eliminate outside of the litter box could be box location, type of litter or litter box used or that the box needs to be cleaned more frequently. Simply adding a few more litter boxes in quieter locations or changing the litter type (clay, scoopable, unscented, cedar, paper, crystal, etc.) itself solves this issue.

If you have a multi-cat household, ensure that you have at least one litter box, plus one extra for each cat in the house, i.e. if you have two cats, you should have three litter boxes.

Tip: Never yell at or punish your cat for not using her litter box. It will only make her afraid of you.

Keeping your Cat Safe and Happy in an Indoor Home

For cats, the great outdoors is anything but great. Whether they live in the city, in the suburbs, or in the country, outdoor cats face a multitude of risks. They are exposed to contagious diseases, most of which are fatal. Traffic takes a huge toll on free-roaming cats, and while many people believe their pets are street-wise, no cat looks both ways when being chased by another animal. Further dangers include poisons, leghold traps, pet theft, and inhumane treatment by cruel people. The best way to

safeguard your new companion against these perils is to keep him indoors and supervise outdoor visits.

In your cat fancies an outdoor excursion, there are several types of safe outside enclosures and many cats can be trained to walk on a leash and harness with careful, patient training. Please note, harnesses must be well fitting otherwise your kitty can escape. Practice leash walking indoors first, then take it on the road.

Indoor cats lead long, happy, healthy lives when given plenty of toys and outlets for their energy, as well as plenty of attention and affection. Play time is an important element in an indoor cat's life. By encouraging play indoors, you will reduce your cat's desire to explore the outdoors and increase his overall life expectancy. Most cats enjoy the mental stimulation gained from a variety of toys. Many cats will enjoy the indoors if you enrich the space with a variety of things: toys, scratch posts, videos made for cats, and perches they can use to watch the world from the safety of the window in your home.

Scratching is a natural and necessary behavior. Providing several different types of scratching posts, i.e. carpeted, sisal rope, cardboard, etc. and trimming your cat's nails often, goes a long way in preventing inappropriate scratching. See the section on "**Solutions to Cat Behavioral Issues**" for additional details.

Feeding cats out of food dispensing toys, instead of a regular bowl, provides enrichment and gives your cat much needed exercise.

Cat toys are available at your local pet store, however, many can be made from common household items. Shower rings, ping-pong balls, cardboard boxes and empty cardboard rolls from toilet paper or paper towels are ideal toys for cats, and very inexpensive. Try hiding favorite toys throughout the house when you leave, giving your cat something to do while you're gone, and rotate them often. Electronic or motion activated toys can provide hours of fun while you're away.

Entertaining And Training Your Cat (courtesy of SF SPCA)

To be physically and behaviorally healthy, your cat needs outlets for her innate feline abilities. That means opportunities to stalk, hunt, pounce, climb, hide in safe shelter, and watch interesting small-animal activity like fish in a bowl, birds outside a window, or screensavers with moving critters. She also needs plenty of respectful attention from and interaction with you.

Indoor vs. Outdoor

We recommend keeping your cat indoors. This may sound like an unnatural life for a cat—and in a sense, it is. But like it or not, we humans have created a world that isn't safe for cats to roam in, whether in cities, suburbs, or the countryside.

Compare the hazards of these two lifestyles:

Outdoor Hazards

Getting hit by a car
Fights with other cats and wild animals
Diseases (feline leukemia, FIV)
Parasites (fleas, worms, ticks, mites)

Indoor Hazards

Boredom
Weight gain due to inactivity
Household poisoning or accident

Chemicals (anti-freeze, rat poison)
Getting trapped in garages, basements
Inclement weather, hunger, and thirst
Being stolen or mistreated by strangers

Given that you can easily alleviate—or completely eliminate—the indoor hazards by playing with your cat, enriching her environment in various ways, and cat-proofing your home, it's easy to see how the indoor-only lifestyle is superior.

However, if you decide your cat should have outdoor experiences, here are ways to do so safely:

- Install the CAT FENCE-IN™ backyard netting system.
- Build an enclosure (many cat magazines have plans and ideas)
- Train your cat to wear a harness and walk her on a leash

For more information, see *Keeping Cats Indoors* in the Resources section of our website.

Preventing Escapes

For some cats, transitioning to an indoor-only lifestyle may be an adjustment, especially if the cat has lived outdoors in the past or is naturally adventurous. Here are some tips to keep your cat safe:

- Avoid getting into the habit of saying hello or goodbye to your cat right next to the doorway.
- Instead, designate another spot away from the door for all greetings and departures. This should be a spot your cat likes, such as her cat tree or condo.
- When entering the home, walk directly to the designated spot before greeting your cat.
- Say goodbye here rather than at the door as well. Distract your cat by leaving her with a treat or a toy.

How to Play with Your Cat

Fun toys that encourage your cat to entertain herself are great. But truly stimulating and satisfying play involves a playmate—you. We recommend two interactive play sessions per day of about 10–15 minutes. Great times are in the morning before you leave or start work, and in the afternoon/evening shortly after arriving home or finishing work.

1. Set the Stage

Create a jungle gym or obstacle course in your living room with cardboard boxes, chairs, and paper bags (never plastic) with the handles cut off as proxy bushes and trees. Create tunnels by rolling up area rugs. Add interest with egg cartons, shoeboxes, and paper tubes scattered along the way.

2. Provide Realistic Prey

Over time, get an assortment of “prey” so you can vary the game. Great options are toys that resemble the look and movements of birds, rodents, insects, and snakes. For interactive play, nothing beats the fishing-pole variety of those toys. When you play with your cat, try to mimic the relevant prey animal’s behavior. Birds, for example, flap their wings, land occasionally, take a step or two, and then take off again. And give your cat time to plan her attack so her mind is engaged, not just her reflex to swat at anything that dangles.

3. Make It Fun

Allow your cat to make many satisfying captures during a play session. Keep this in mind if you use interactive toy alternatives like laser light pointers or soap bubbles. Fun as they can be, don’t rely solely on these; it’s too frustrating for your cat to never actually get to catch her prey.

4. End the Game Gradually

Always gradually wind down play sessions, not abruptly. Do this by making the injured prey slowly “die.” This sets off end-of-hunt responses in your cat, lowering her excitement and energy level.

Put all interactive toys away between play sessions; they should be reserved for playtime with you. Instead leave out furry mice and other toys that are safe for solo play.

Environmental Enrichment

Enriching your cat’s environment is key to having a healthy, happy cat. Just as zoos provide toys, puzzles, and food challenges to alleviate boredom and stress in wild cats, you can use environmental enrichment to reduce urine marking, play aggression, cat-cat aggression, and fearful behavior in your cat.

- Cats are hunters, so never free-feed. Have your cat forage for her food by using treat balls and other food-dispensing toys, and by hiding dollops of food in different locations throughout the house.
- Get a cat fountain or use an old bowl for games that involve floating ping-pong balls or hollow plastic fish.
- Have a variety of toys for solo play and rotate them so your cat doesn’t get bored with her squeaky mouse or crinkle ball.
- Fish tanks with secure covers, cat videos of birds and small animals, and computer screensavers can entertain your cat for hours.
- Use catnip in toys or simply as a stimulant once every two to three weeks to see your cat enjoy some silly antics. Stop if your cat becomes aggressive while under the influence of catnip.
- Put a ping-pong ball in the bathtub; the slight slope toward the drain will help the ball stay in motion, and it won’t be lost under the sofa.

Training Your Cat

It’s time to dispense with the myth that cats can’t be trained. Not only can you train your cat to come when called, do a high five, and go through an agility course, but you also can change unwanted behaviors, reinforce behaviors you like, and help her become less fearful and more confident.

Positive Reinforcement

Training your cat through positive reinforcement means using your cat’s natural motivations to teach her which behaviors you like and which you don’t. The trick is to find the right motivations. Where

dogs have been bred to work with us and respond well to praise and attention, cats are solo hunters and much less social.

Determine your cat's favorite things, such as play, toys, and treats, and use those to motivate her.

A Word on Punishment

Never use physical punishment. A cat's response to yelling or physical punishment is stress—and stress is the leading cause of behavior problems such as aggression and house soiling. It also erodes the trust between you and your cat and prevents learning.

A Word on Declawing

Declawing involves surgical amputation of the first joint on a cat's paw and is most often done to prevent the cat from scratching furniture or people. The procedure comes with health risks and unfortunate behavioral consequences. We **strongly** advise against declawing, and instead recommend training cats to use scratching posts and trimming their claws regularly.

Solutions to Cat Behavioral Issues

Just like dogs, cats can suffer from behavioral issues and end up being returned to the shelter. Some issues include scratching home furnishings, or aggression to other cats or people. In many cases, these behaviors are caused by the cat not being provided with enough exercise and mental stimulation or being introduced to other cats too quickly. Providing your cat with proper toys, play time, exercise and socialization often prevents these issues.

Stalking, pouncing and other natural, instinctual predatory behaviors are often mistaken for aggression which can be redirected and addressed by offering proper toys and play time. Cats may also bite or scratch when they are over-stimulated, feel cornered or are trying to get away. By providing your cat with an appropriate amount of play time and learning basic cat body language you can often avoid aggressive in cats **See our handout on Feline Body Language for more details.**

Scratching

Scratching is a natural and important behavior for cats that helps them stay limber and healthy. To accommodate this essential scratching behavior in your cat, it will be important to practice patience and provide proper areas for your cat to scratch.

Cats can learn to use a scratching post at almost any stage in their life. When choosing a scratching post, think about what your cats already like to scratch. Some prefer sisal or rope covered posts, while others prefer wood or corrugated cardboard scratching posts. In addition, cats may have a preference about a vertical or horizontal orientation of the scratching posts. Observe your cat's behavior when he is scratching to see what he finds the most comfortable or enjoyable. An easy way to eliminate damage to your furniture or to you during very active play is to simply clip your cat's nails. You should consult with your veterinarian about when and how to properly trim your new cat's nails.

We strongly recommend getting a cat tree or kitty condo to give your cat(s) her own space. Having one or more cat trees or condos, especially in a multi-cat household, is a very effective tool to help keep your cat(s) happy and stress free. When a cat has vertical space, this helps them feel confident.

Unwanted Behaviors

Using positive reinforcement methods doesn't mean you never say "no" to your cat. You just say it in a way she understands instead of using human language.

Either:

Avoid the situation. Restrict your cat's access to a place, person, or object.

Redirect her to an acceptable channel for her behavior, for example pouncing on a toy instead of your shoe, or scratching her post instead of the couch.

For more about cat training and behavior, see the book recommendations handout or visit Karen Pryor's website, clickertraining.com.

If you have any other questions, please contact the shelter at **908.725.0308**.

