



Introducing Cats to Your Farm

Two cat experts share their tips to help your new cat adjust to farm living.

To make your new cat's transition to the farm less stressful, provide it with a litter box, water and twice-daily meals. Introducing a new cat to your farm can be tricky, especially if the cat has been previously housed in an animal shelter, apartment or a fenced yard in the suburbs.

Deb Eldredge, a small-animal veterinarian who lives on a small farm in upstate New York with several cats of her own, and Frances Hammond, director and treasurer of Caring Hearts Feline Rescue in Kentucky and life-long barn cat owner, offer tips from choosing the right cat for your farm to caring for your new pet.

Choosing Your Cat's New Home

"First, you need to decide if this cat will be a house cat who goes outside or a barn cat," Eldredge advises. She says barn cats are more at risk for rabies, feline leukemia, parasites, predators and getting hit by cars. However, they can be a big help in keeping rodent population low and thus help protect tack and farm equipment from damage.

Frances says she does not recommend placing cats that are used to being indoors all the time or kittens in a barn.

"They [small kittens] don't have the survival skills to stay away from horse hooves, et cetera," she says. "However, if the kittens were born outside and are somewhat feral, they may do fine."

If you cannot keep kittens in your home, Frances advises placing small kittens in a safe and enclosed area until they are several months old.

Cat Types and Gender

Eldredge says the ideal cat "comes with the farm"—a stray that has been surviving on its own and is happy to adapt to your family.

While just about any breed of cat can learn to live on a farm, certain breeds may work better on a farm than others.

"A short-haired cat has advantages over a long-haired cat—no worries about matted hair, burdocks caught in the coat, less problem with hairballs, et cetera," Eldredge says. "Female cats (even spayed) tend to be better hunters than males. Anecdotal, tortoiseshells and calicos are reputed to be the best hunters, while orange males have the reputation of being the sweetest. Often an adult cat from a shelter with a history of being an outdoor cat is a good choice."

Introducing Your Cat to the Farm

Adult cats may run away from a barn if they are not confined at first.

"It is imperative when introducing a cat to a barn that it be confined in a cage or tack room for two to four weeks," Frances says. "I usually confine a new cat for a month. The owner will be able to determine when the cat is comfortable. A socialized cat will adapt more quickly. A fearful cat will have to be confined for a longer time."

Frances says the new cat should be in a place where cats already living in the barn can smell and see the newcomer.

"Cats are very territorial, even when altered, so the new cat will be the subject of great interest until the cat hierarchy is established," she explains.

To make the adjustment less stressful on a cat, Eldredge recommends providing a litter box during confinement and feeding the cat there so it thinks of the room or cage as a safe place.

Caring for Your Farm Cat

"There is a myth that barn cats won't catch mice and rats if they are fed," Frances says. "This is absolutely not true! Barn cats should be fed twice daily and have fresh water at all times. A heated water bowl must be provided in the winter. The cats should also have access to shelter, such as a tack room or hay loft or stall."

Eldredge adds that feeding your cat nightly with canned food will draw the cat into the barn at night and help protect it from night predators such as coyotes, raccoons and owls.



In addition to predators, barn cats are more susceptible to parasites and diseases. “It is a good idea to deworm twice yearly—both for roundworms and also tapeworms,” Eldredge says. “Make sure vaccines like rabies, feline leukemia and distemper are up to date. A topical flea and tick medication may be needed.”

Eldredge also recommends spaying or neutering your cat to deter wandering from your farm.

Looking for a cat to adopt? Email the Caring Hearts Feline Rescue.