

Taming to Love: How to Rescue a Feral Kitten

With patience and persistence, you can tame a wild kitten and transform her into a loving pet.

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The Feral Cat Coalition (FCC), a San Diego organization, recommends confining newly captured kittens in a cage large enough to hold a litterbox and food. If you don't have a large-enough cage, confine the kittens in a spare room or bathroom. The point is to corral them in a limited space where they cannot escape or hide in a spot that you would have difficulty reaching.

If you have other cats in the home, protect them by preventing any contact with the feral kittens until they have been checked by a veterinarian. Always wash your hands after handling the kittens to avoid transferring disease to your other cats.

Getting Comfortable Initially, the kittens just need to grow accustomed to your presence and learn to trust you. They will notice that you bring food. Visit them often. Keep your body still and speak softly.

The FCC recommends starting to handle the kittens after two days.

1. Start with the least aggressive kitten.
2. Gently place a towel over it and pick it up in the towel.
3. If the kitten remains calm, place it on your lap and gently pet it on the head from behind. A variation is to use a soft pet brush, which imitates the mothers grooming tongue.

Do this with each kitten, then give them all a special treat, such as a dollop of meat-flavored baby food. Repeat as frequently as possible.

It is also extremely important to remove fleas immediately, because kittens become anemic from flea infestation and this increases their susceptibility to illness. Because flea-control products may not be safe for kittens under 6 weeks of age, use a flea comb. Drop any fleas you find into a jar of rubbing alcohol. Combing also helps the bonding process.

Food Equals Love First, I leave food and water in the kittens cage or room so they can eat whenever they want. I visit often and speak gently. Then I remove the food for a few hours. When I bring it back, I provide a more delicious food than they received before, such as baby food.