

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.

Sarah Magee

When I first fed the kitten that showed up in my backyard, she retreated into the woods if I stood too close. Daily, I moved the food closer to my back door. Nervous, but drawn by the food, the little gray-and-white tabby approached as I spoke softly to her, calling her Baby.

I moved the food progressively closer and finally deeper inside the house. Finally, Baby was far enough inside that I could close the door behind her. Terrified, this feral kitten crashed into the walls in her desperate attempt to escape.

What is Feral? The term feral describes a wild or savage creature. Feral cats live as wild animals, without owners or homes. Unfortunately, most feral cats have not been spayed or neutered, so they reproduce prolifically. To prevent the kittens from living the same tough lives as their parents, they must be tamed and adopted.

Ideally, remove feral kittens from the nest at 4 or 5 weeks of age, when they can be safely weaned. If you remove them sooner, they are less likely to survive. At around 6 weeks of age, they start romping and playing out of the nest, making it more difficult to capture them - it may just take more patience, as it did with my experience with Baby.

Carefully try to capture the mother as well, and have her spayed. This will help reduce the feral cat population.

Protect Yourself Make sure both you and the kittens are safe and protected before and after you capture them.

You do not want to get bitten, says Sara Winikoff, DVM, a veterinarian in suburban New York who devotes half her practice to feral cats. A feral kitten could have rabies.

Until a veterinarian verifies the kittens health and you are confident that it will not bite you, always handle the kitten with a towel or heavy gloves.