

The Best of Both Worlds

Breed rescue combines love of purebreds with compassion for homeless cats.

Kari Winters

Are you pining for a Persian or silly over Siamese but believe you can never have one because you feel strongly about rescuing animals? Then you should know about breed rescue.

What is a Breed? When people describe a purebred cat, they are really referring to a pedigreed cat. There are strict criteria about what constitutes a pedigreed cat: It must come with papers that validate its parentage. Breed rescue groups may occasionally have a pedigreed cat, but this is rare. However, a cat doesn't have to be pedigreed to be a member of a breed.

The Cat Fanciers Association (CFA), the largest pedigreed cat registry in the United States, has written policies to help define what constitutes a breed. For the purposes of rescue only, [purebred] is defined as: any cat which appears to look like or closely resemble a breed fully recognized by the Cat Fanciers Association Inc., The International Cat Association Inc. or the American Cat Fanciers Association Inc. The policies further state that a purebred mix is defined, for the purposes of rescue only, as: any cat which appears to have several significant characteristics of a breed fully recognized by the organizations listed above.

Know Your Breed Before deciding on a breed, do your homework. You may love the look of a particular breed, but can you live with its personality? Pedigreed cats are not only bred for looks, but also for temperament, says Marva Marrow, cat behaviorist, rescuer and breeder of Oriental Shorthairs. Breeds that are very active, such as Abyssinians, won't ever become calm lap kitties, and breeds that are laid back, such as Persians will never become play monsters. Activity levels are characteristics that can't be changed and it's important to remember that personality traits are not behavioral problems.

Some breeds such as Siamese and Oriental Shorthair are very vocal, inquisitive and energetic. Although some people love these characteristics, others find them annoying, particularly when faced with them on a daily basis.

People who apply to rescue a particular breed aren't always a good match for that breed. Sal Vitale, a Bengal rescue volunteer and president of the International Bengal Cat Society, says he frequently spends a couple of hours talking with applicants about the breed's personality, how it responds and its activity level, so potential owners fully understand what they'll be getting into if they adopt a Bengal. Other breed rescuers report spending similar amounts of time with potential adopters.